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# Great Artists of the Italian Renaissance

Course Guidebook

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The Smithsonian Associates, Smithsonian Institution



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# Great Artists of the Italian Renaissance

## Scope:

This course of 36 lectures introduces the art of the Italian Renaissance—the epoch that was the genesis of the next 500 years of Western art. This survey will extend from about 1400 to about 1520. The artistic language associated with the late Middle Ages began to be replaced with a radically new style around the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and the chosen terminus date permits the inclusion of the complete careers of Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael while acknowledging the radical shift in style that occurred in the 1520s. The dates, therefore, cover the art historical periods commonly called the Early Renaissance and the High Renaissance.

The focus will be on central and northern Italy, with central Italy considered first. Instead of integrating the artists of north and south, the course makes clear the strong contrasts between the two regions. The city of Florence in central Italy was the birthplace of the Renaissance and the location of most of its defining moments and monuments. Rome, though then a somewhat moribund city, was the seat of the Catholic Church and, therefore, of great power and influence. Other sites where notable artistic events occurred, for example, Arezzo and Orvieto, will also be included. Northern Italy had many cities with strong individual traditions, notably Padua, after the arrival of Donatello to work in the pilgrimage basilica of San Antonio, and Mantua, the court of the d'Este family. Venice, dominating the north on the Adriatic, was the birthplace of a distinct artistic tradition whose influence has never ebbed.

From Masaccio to Raphael, from Donatello to Michelangelo, from Piero della Francesca to Leonardo da Vinci, and from Giovanni Bellini to Titian, more significant artists were born and more epochal art created in Italy in the 15<sup>th</sup> century than in any comparable place and century in the history of art. In this course, we will look at some great ensembles of world-renowned art, such as the Brancacci Chapel in Florence or the Sistine Chapel in Rome, and at single masterpieces, such as Titian's *Assumption of the Virgin* or Botticelli's *Primavera*. No later Western art can be discussed without reference to the Italian Renaissance, its rediscovery of the achievements of classical antiquity, and its own artistic inventions. Above all, a canon of beauty was established—with many variations—that served artists for centuries. Humanism—an ideal synthesis of human intelligence, dignity, and spiritual vigor—was the basis for that canon. The paintings, sculptures,

and buildings of the Renaissance continue to astonish us by their harmonies of drawing, color, and proportion and in their embodiment of humanism. As already noted, this course will conclude at the beginning of the 1520s, with the Protestant Reformation and the beginnings of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, when radically new political and social conditions brought with them a radically new art.

As the title suggests, most of the lectures are on individual artists, presented in roughly chronological order, and the emphasis is on the style and content of their paintings and sculptures. Essential elements of the political, social, and intellectual milieu in which the artists worked will be introduced throughout the lectures, but this is not primarily a course on those subjects. There is an enormous literature on the civilization of the Renaissance, which the bibliography can only suggest. The artist-centered approach of the course is, perhaps, slightly unfashionable these days. But in these art historical lectures, when limited time dictates a choice between art and history, art will dominate.

Beginning in Florence in the late-Gothic period, into which the founding artists of the Renaissance were born, we look at such artists as Lorenzo Ghiberti, whose style is divided between Gothic and Renaissance. Filippo Brunelleschi and Donatello are the principal founders of the Renaissance style. Architecture is mostly beyond the scope of these lectures, but the early Renaissance in Florence cannot be properly understood without looking at Brunelleschi's buildings. When his dome for the cathedral was completed around 1434, "rising above the skies, ample to cover with its shadow all the Tuscan people" (wrote Leon Battista Alberti), the primacy of the "good modern manner" was established. The influence of Donatello's sculpture was unequaled before that of Michelangelo. The greatest painter of the early Renaissance, Masaccio, is studied in two lectures, in which he is also compared to Giotto, the great "proto-Renaissance" master of a century earlier. One lecture is devoted to the Brancacci Chapel, one of the most influential works of European painting.

More than 40 artists are included in these lectures. Here, we will anticipate only the most famous. The greatest artist of mid-century, Piero della Francesca, did not work in Florence, and indeed, his fame was established only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We will look at the work of a handful of the gifted sculptors between Donatello and Michelangelo. Botticelli, whose wistful grace gave way to anguished expression, is studied in two lectures. The triumvirate of artists whose names are, for many, synonymous with the



Renaissance will be examined in seven lectures. Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael are artists of the High Renaissance, and their influence and fame has scarcely waned from their day to our own.

Our transition to northern Italy is by way of Urbino, which offers us a microcosm of the cultured Renaissance city-state. There, the arts and learning were honored by a professional soldier whose small dukedom fostered remarkable achievements. Further north, in Padua and Mantua, we will look at the famous frescoes of Andrea Mantegna. Venice, the proud center of culture in northern, Adriatic Italy, will be the focus of eight lectures, beginning with its Byzantine-accented glories in architecture and decoration. The self-reflexive character of this city, whose daily life and public spaces were so often painted, will be observed in work by Carpaccio and Gentile Bellini. The introduction of the oil medium into Italian painting will be studied in the pivotal short career of Antonello da Messina, a visitor to Venice, and the long career of Giovanni Bellini, the first of the great Venetian masters of the Renaissance. From Giovanni's workshop came a generation of important artists who defined the Venetian High Renaissance. They included Giorgione, whose few surviving paintings, all agree, altered the development of Western art, and Titian, who blended the achievements of Giorgione, central Italian painting, and his own coloristic genius into a style of stirring beauty and six decades of influential art.

We have alluded to the enormous political and religious upheavals in Italy during the early 16<sup>th</sup> century that disrupted the ideal moment of the High Renaissance. The long later careers of Michelangelo and Titian can only be touched on as we summarize the course of Renaissance art from 1400 to about 1520. There were not the only lives and careers that collided with the much-changed world of post-Reformation Italy. Thus, finally, we will look briefly at the artistic maelstrom that mirrored the historical one swirling during the remainder of that century.

# Lecture One

## Italy and the Renaissance

**Scope:** *Renaissance* means “rebirth.” For most people, the historical period that bears this name is virtually synonymous with Italy. That is because the rebirth that is meant is the rebirth of the ancient past of Greece and Rome, and the Italian peninsula contains abundant physical evidence of the Roman Empire. Even before the modern sense of history, this awareness of a glorious past of political and cultural unity that had been ended by invasions of Goths and Vandals was part of the collective consciousness. The period between the Roman Empire and the Renaissance soon came to be called simply the Middle Ages, and its artistic legacy disparaged as “Gothic.” This introductory lecture examines the more complex reality of Italian cultural development during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. We must not omit Dante (1265–1321) and Petrarch (1304–1374), both exiled from Florence, to whom cultural unity owes an enormous debt. Dante’s *Divine Comedy* has been said to have invented Italian as a major language, to which Petrarch’s sonnets greatly contributed. Petrarch also worked for the Italian political unity aspired to by Cola di Rienzi (c. 1313–1354) whose troops expelled the nobles from Rome in 1348. Rienzi invited representatives from the many city-states to Rome to discuss unification; although the effort failed, it reinforced the sense of Italian cultural unity.

Humanism, a philosophical, literary, and artistic ideal, went hand in hand with this rebirth, emphasizing the dignity and potential of man and inspiring secular studies and the creation of an art that reflected the forms and ideas of the classical world. It would be a mistake, however, to simply equate humanism with secularism. Although Petrarch offered Platonic thought as an alternative to the Christian synthesis of faith and reason (called *scholasticism*), Renaissance society remained permeated with religion. In painting, Giotto (1266/67–1337) evolved a proto-Renaissance style in contrast to the prevailing late-Gothic style, but his impact was cut short a decade after his death by one of the great catastrophes of recorded history—the Black Death, the plague. Physical decimation forced a spiritual crisis and a choice: extreme penitence

or self-indulgence. Art, on the whole, regressed to a severe medieval, even Byzantine, style for most of the second half of the century. Perhaps the leading artist in Florence who reflected this harsh, potent style was Andrea Orcagna, painter, sculptor, and architect. Although its character changed, artistic activity and patronage continued unabated.

## Outline

- I. We must first define *Renaissance*, then place it geographically and chronologically.
  - A. *Renaissance* = “rebirth.” It is the name given to a major period of European civilization. It is not primarily a style name, though it is often used in that way. Italy is the first and principal location of the Renaissance.
    1. That was because the great classical artistic tradition of the Roman Republic and Roman Empire had left its physical evidence throughout Italy.
    2. Despite the centuries since the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, during which the achievements of ancient Rome (and those of Greece, whose civilization nurtured and was then absorbed by the Romans) were neglected, an awareness of the classical past had never entirely vanished.
  - B. The “memory” of the unified political world and the single language of the Roman Empire was also waiting to be revived.
    1. Italy, as we think of it, is a creation of modern nationalism and less than 150 years old.
    2. Until about 1300, Italy was a loosely related collection of city-states. This decentralized condition was the norm in Western Europe in the long medieval period.
    3. The late 13<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a consciousness (among the educated classes) of the collective past and larger cultural unity. Linguistic and, thus, cultural unity owed an enormous debt to Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and to Petrarch’s sonnets.
- II. By common agreement, the Renaissance is said to have begun near the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and continued until about the third decade of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

- A. The Renaissance in Italy did not arise suddenly at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century in a single city-state, yet it was in Florence that it took deepest root. Humanism, with its emphasis on classical antiquity and secularism, was a key component of the Renaissance, and philosophers, writers, artists, and statesmen all played roles. Their shared ideals led to a unified culture.
  - B. Also important were the rediscovery and translation of ancient texts and a developing sense of history in the modern sense.
- III. Proto-Renaissance:** The Renaissance in art might well have begun with Giotto di Bondone (Colle 1266/67–Florence 1337). He worked in Assisi at the famous shrine of Saint Francis, in Florence, possibly in Rome, but his crowning achievement is the fresco cycle in the Arena Chapel in Padua (c. 1305).
- A. To understand Giotto's innovations requires a look at the prevailing late-Gothic style in painting. One of the most important painters of the time was Duccio, from Siena, near Florence.
  - B. The characteristics of Giotto's art are simplicity, clarity, powerful form, deeply felt emotion, narrative force, a grasp in every way of the essential—a cumulative power. These are characteristics we often associate with the art of the Renaissance, and Giotto is a major source of this association.
  - C. His space is strictly delimited to a shallow stage, and the blue background does not provide an illusion of the sky, only a shorthand for it. True spatial illusionism is yet to come.
- IV. After Giotto's death,** while his influence was continuing to develop, came a great catastrophe—the plague, the Black Death (1347–1349), one of the great disasters of European history. Decimation of the population was followed by spiritual upheaval. The early development of humanism was arrested, and the Renaissance was put on hold.
- A. The Black Death, which had recurrent episodes until the end of the century, led to profound gloom throughout Europe; this despair translated into intense piety in all classes of society.
  - B. The humanistic art of Giotto and his followers was replaced by a severe art that emphasized guilt and the need to repent and in which mysticism and the authority of the Church both offered hope.

1. Many artists perished, which further cut short Giotto's influence.
2. The forbidding style of Andrea Orcagna now dominated Florentine art.
3. In Pisa, in the cloistered burial ground called the Campo Santo, a fresco, *The Triumph of Death*, summed up the prevailing pessimism.

## Works Discussed:

Duccio:

*Entombment of Christ (The Lamentation)* from *Maestà*, 1308–1311, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo Metropolitana, Siena.

Giotto:

*The Lamentation of Christ*, c. 1305, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, Padua.

Justus of Ghent:

*Petrarch*, late 1470s, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino.

Master of The Triumph of Death,

*The Triumph of Death*, details of the *Garden of Love* and *Hunters before the Dead*, mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, Campo Santo, Pisa.

Domenico di Michelino:

*Dante, Allegory of the Divine Comedy and City of Florence*, c. 1465, Duomo, Florence.

Andrea Orcagna:

*Enthroned Christ with Madonna and Saints (Strozzi Altarpiece)*, 1354–1357, Strozzi Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

G. P. Pannini:

*Peasants among Roman Ruins*, 1743, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

## Essential Reading:

Adams, Laurie Schneider. *Italian Renaissance Art*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001, chapters 1–2. (Hereafter, cited as Adams.)

Hartt, Frederick. *History of Italian Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Revised by David G. Wilkins. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2002, chapters 1, 3–5. (Hereafter, cited as Hartt.)

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Burckhardt, Jacob. *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. Oxford: Phaidon, 1965 (first published in 1860).

Burke, Peter. *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy*. 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. Princeton, NJ: University of Princeton Press, 1999.

Cole, Bruce. *Giotto: The Scrovegni Chapel, Padua*. New York: George Braziller, 1993.

Meiss, Millard. *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. Why did the Renaissance begin and flourish in Italy?
2. What events in the 14<sup>th</sup> century may have delayed the onset of the Renaissance?

## Lecture Two

### From Gothic to Renaissance

**Scope:** At the outset, I want to stress the design of this course as it was stated earlier in the Course Scope: The emphasis is on artists and their art, not on the larger historical-political-social milieu of the Renaissance. That said, historical essentials will not be ignored. Italy was a locus of ancient classical civilization and of the Catholic Church from the beginnings of organized Christianity. Around the year 1400, a late-medieval style of art so widespread in Europe that it has become known as *International Gothic* flourished in Italy. It is characterized by a marked preference for decoration, in brilliant color and expressive curvilinear drawing. Its forms, although three-dimensional, favor flatness over the illusion of volume. It is lyrical and celebratory. An element of realism, more properly called naturalism, is found in the observed details of landscape, animals, and costume. Its content is usually religious, reflecting the dominance of the Catholic Church in European culture. Into this culture in Italy were born, in the 1370s and 1380s, an important group of artists. Some—such as Lorenzo Monaco and Gentile da Fabriano—retained the Gothic style of their youth, making art of great decorative expressiveness. Others, such as Lorenzo Ghiberti, began their careers in the late-medieval style and ended it in a newly developing style that we call the Renaissance.

### Outline

- I. The Christian religion and the Roman Catholic Church were the central forces in Europe during the Middle Ages between the fall of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance. In Italy, the geographical centers of art around 1400 were the city-states into which the peninsula was divided. Central Italy, and especially Tuscany, came to be dominated by Florence for much of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.
  - A. After the fall of the Western Roman Empire to the Goths in 476, Europe had only one unifying force, Christianity, as represented by the Roman Church. It was only in Italy, however, that it was a centralizing force.

**B.** Christianity gradually assumed a role as a temporal power through a succession of events.

1. In 313, the Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, which granted tolerance to Christianity, and many churches were soon built in Rome, including Saint Peter's.
2. In the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Pope Leo I began to assert temporal power for the Church. This claim was supported by a spurious document, the "Donation of Constantine," which purported to record Constantine's gift of the western empire to the papacy. The forgery was uncovered only in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.
3. Charlemagne was crowned Holy Roman Emperor by the pope in 800, which paradoxically resulted in persistent conflict between Church and empire for centuries.
4. By the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, the papacy reached a high point of power.

**II.** In Italy, the 14<sup>th</sup> century is called the *Trecento*. The literal meaning is "three hundred," but it is shorthand (*mila*, "one thousand," is dropped) for the one thousand three hundreds. Likewise, the 15<sup>th</sup> century is called the *Quattrocento*, and the 16<sup>th</sup>, the *Cinquecento*. Because these Italian terms are commonly used in art historical writing and in speaking about Italian art, even in non-Italian countries, we will often use them in these lectures.

**III.** *International Gothic* is the name given to the dominant style of the late 14<sup>th</sup> and early 15<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe.

- A.** The style is characterized by highly colored decoration and curvilinear drawing, and it tends to flatness rather than volume. The habitual use of gold for the background accentuates all of this.
- B.** It is naturalistic; that is, it is realistic in the depiction of natural details of landscape and other elements.
- C.** It is usually religious in content.

**IV.** In Italy, the International Gothic style had many adherents, including Lorenzo Monaco (c. 1370–c. 1425) and Gentile da Fabriano (c. 1385–1427).

- A.** Lorenzo's paintings are marked by intimacy and restraint, a delicate lyricism. Born in Siena, he moved to Florence, where he entered a monastery and practiced his art.



1. Naive charm characterizes his *Nativity* (1409), a small panel once part of the *predella* of a now-unidentified altarpiece. A *predella* is the pedestal of an altarpiece and is often composed of small paintings whose subjects reflect the theme of the large altar painting above.
  2. *Coronation of the Virgin* (1413) is an example of an entire altarpiece painted by Lorenzo. Exquisite color and large, gracefully drawn figures characterize the painting, in which some effects of volume are counterpoised by a magical weightlessness.
- B.** Gentile's paintings are sumptuous in color, usually with brilliant gold backgrounds against which the figures of the religious narratives are placed. He traveled widely in Italy, including spending several important years in Florence.
1. His version of the *Coronation of the Virgin* (c. 1400?) is simplicity itself when compared with Lorenzo's full court of attendant figures. Gentile shows only Christ bestowing the heavenly crown on his Mother, while God the Father, with seraphim, presides above them. They are elevated above the earth against a golden background, while below, a band of tiny angel musicians play.
  2. His famous *Adoration of the Magi* (1423) was an influential, much-imitated painting. It is glorious in the rich costumes of the Magi, often physically enhanced by building up the surface with *gesso* to emulate crowns or other costume elements. Crowded with figures, it has the atmosphere of a pageant and must have greatly appealed to contemporaries who loved public events.
- V.** Lorenzo Ghiberti (c. 1381–1455) was one of the greatest sculptors in Florence. He occupies a transitional place between the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, with half his work belonging to the Gothic era and half to the “new style.”
- A.** In 1401, he won a public competition (discussed in the next lecture) to design a set of bronze doors for the Florentine Baptistery, perhaps the most venerable monument in the city. His chief competition for the project was Filippo Brunelleschi, who will be discussed in the next lecture.

- B.** Ghiberti's doors, on the north side of the Baptistery, were designed and produced over a long period, from 1403–1424. Stylistically, they belong to the late Gothic period.
1. Because there are 28 panels on the doors, the drastically reduced field for each narrative scene focuses attention on the composition, which had to be carefully condensed and confined to meaningful essentials. Another obvious limitation—the absence of color other than gilding—further concentrated the artist's efforts on expressive figures.
  2. In the *Annunciation* relief, Ghiberti constructs a horizontal shelf as a ground plane for the figures and a vertical doorway on the right side to enframe the Virgin Annunciate, who stands within, her body describing a graceful arc. At the left, the Archangel Gabriel alights, his diagonal body leading to the Virgin; God the Father emerges diagonally from a cloud in the upper left cusp of the *quatrefoil*, while the dove of the Holy Spirit departs from him. The convergence of the two diagonals toward the Virgin dramatizes the moment of Incarnation.
- C.** While this project was proceeding, Ghiberti was commissioned to produce a life-size bronze statue of Saint John the Baptist (c. 1412–1416) for a niche on the exterior of the Gothic church (or, more accurately, chapel) of Orsanmichele. It was conceived with a curvilinear sweep comparable to Lorenzo Monaco's painted figures but with a forceful humanity that suggests a shift in attitude if not in style.

### Works Discussed:

Gentile da Fabriano:

*Coronation of the Virgin and Saints (Valle Romita Polyptych)*, c. 1400, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

*Adoration of the Magi*, 1423, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

Lorenzo Ghiberti:

*The Annunciation* and *Adoration of the Magi*, panels from the North Doors, 1403–1424, Baptistery, Florence.

*Saint John the Baptist*, 1412–1414, Museo di Orsanmichele, Florence.

Lorenzo Monaco:

*The Nativity*, c. 1409, Robert Lehman Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

*Coronation of the Virgin*, 1413, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

**Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapters 3–4.

Hartt, chapters 7–8.

**Supplementary Reading:**

White, John. *Art and Architecture in Italy, 1250–1400*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973. Pelican History of Art.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What was the role of Christianity in the Renaissance?
2. Why do you think the transition from medieval art to Renaissance art was a slow process?

## Lecture Three

### Brunelleschi and Ghiberti in Florence

**Scope:** Architecture is central to understanding the birth of the Renaissance, and it was in Florence that the first great buildings of the Renaissance were constructed. One man above all others was the originator of the new style in architecture: Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446). It was Brunelleschi who traveled from Florence to Rome to study the remains of Roman architecture. He measured them, studied the construction techniques, and probed their proportions and the way in which the ancient Roman architects learned to mold space through the innovation of the arch and vault. In this lecture, we will briefly examine Brunelleschi's work in the Medici Church of San Lorenzo, his crystalline design for the Pazzi Chapel at Santa Croce, and his work on the huge dome of the Cathedral of Florence. These works, together with other major projects, were going on simultaneously, making Brunelleschi the most visible artist in the city. The fame that attended his engineering solution to the construction of the cathedral dome has never waned, and the majesty of the vast cupola became a symbol of the city. But it was in the visual clarity and expression of calm rationality of his work at San Lorenzo and the Pazzi Chapel that the architect succeeded in embodying the humanism of Renaissance art.

Sculpture was also a medium of seminal importance to the development of the Renaissance style. Because it echoed Roman sculpture, because it involved the three-dimensional representation of the human figure, and because it was much used in the integral decoration of architecture, sculpture in the 15<sup>th</sup> century was remarkably innovative, influencing painters rather the reverse. There were several great sculptors in the early decades of the century. Brunelleschi himself was an exceptional sculptor before he concentrated fully on architecture. We have already seen the fine early work of Ghiberti, but his splendid second set of doors (east) for the Baptistery was an achievement that was a defining monument of the early Renaissance and a model for later generations of sculptors. Michelangelo would call them the "Gates of Paradise."

## Outline

- I. The rational principles of the Renaissance were first clearly embodied in the Florentine buildings designed by Filippo Brunelleschi in the second and third decades of the Quattrocento. (They were not articulated in print until 1435 in Leon Battista Alberti's *On Architecture*.)
  - A. Brunelleschi had multiple architectural projects, including the design and construction of San Lorenzo, the church of the ruling Medici family, and his last major design, the chapter house for Santa Croce, commissioned by the Pazzi family.
    1. The nave of San Lorenzo displays the serenity of an architecture devised from a proportional system. Rationality is equated with humanism. This is the first great Renaissance achievement in church architecture.
    2. The Pazzi Chapel is remarkable for the geometric clarity of its proportions, articulation of wall surface, and luminous dome.
    3. Brunelleschi is believed to be the inventor of the linear perspective method that was adopted by Renaissance painters and to have developed it through his careful study of the mathematical principles of architecture.
  - B. Brunelleschi's most famous project was the completion of the Cathedral of Florence, Santa Maria del Fiore, commonly called the Duomo.
    1. The cathedral had been underway for more than a century when Brunelleschi assumed the post of architect. Arnolfo di Cambio, the first architect, drew up his plans around 1300 on a vast scale. Further plans were advanced around 1360. The nave was complete and the foundations for the east end were in place and unchangeable when Brunelleschi solved the problem of constructing a dome that could span the great space above the high altar, about 140 feet in diameter.
    2. *Duomo* is the Italian word for any cathedral, but the word is so strongly associated with the Florentine cathedral that they are practically synonymous in art history. The word derives from *domus*, the Latin word for "house," here, the "house of God."
- II. Sculpture is also of seminal importance in the development of Renaissance art. We have already discussed the bronze doors for the Baptistery designed and cast by Lorenzo Ghiberti between 1403 and

1424. Those doors, referred to in the last lecture, were the result of a famous competition held in 1401. That competition might almost be said to be the prototype of competitions for public art commissions ever since, and it suggests the great importance of sculpture at the outset of the Quattrocento.

A. The 1401 competition was for the design of bronze doors for the north entrance to the Baptistery. The Baptistery has three entrances and already had a set of bronze doors on the south side by Andrea Pisano, completed around 1330. Of the seven entrants in the competition, the finalists were Filippo Brunelleschi and Lorenzo Ghiberti. The subject assigned them was the sacrifice of Isaac.

1. Brunelleschi's competition panel was a startling interpretation, in which an angel physically intervenes, grasping Abraham's knife-bearing arm to prevent him from sacrificing his son. The style is rather abrupt, with an angular Isaac, and a feeling of raw brutality.
2. Ghiberti's panel is more stylish, with a more carefully balanced, less crowded composition, more curvilinear and idealized. Simply put, it is more beautiful, and this is true also of the nude body of Isaac, a true Renaissance creation. Although the drama is slightly less immediate than Brunelleschi's enactment, it is more legible, of great importance in these small narrative scenes.
3. The great success of Ghiberti's doors, produced over the next 20 years, resulted in a commission (without competition) for doors for the third, east entrance.

B. Ghiberti's second set of doors (1425–1452) was the culminating commission for the Baptistery, because the entrance directly opposite the Duomo's façade was the most prestigious.

1. The design of the doors was radically different from the earlier Baptistery doors, each of which had been subdivided into 28 panels (14 on each valve), and each of those inset with a *quatrefoil* shape within which the sculptural figures had to be fitted. That essentially Gothic motif was now abandoned.
2. The new east doors had 10 panels, 5 in each valve, and they were square. These much larger fields were similar to those used in painting and allowed Ghiberti to develop a pictorial style of relief sculpture with remarkable illusions of architectural and landscape space. Each of the panels was

completely gilded, creating an incomparably splendid appearance.

3. That they are known as the “Gates of Paradise” is owed to Michelangelo who was said to have remarked, decades later, that Ghiberti’s doors were worthy to be the gates of Paradise.

### **Works Discussed:**

Filippo Brunelleschi:

*The Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1401, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

Lorenzo Ghiberti:

*The Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1401, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

*The Story of Adam and Eve, The Story of Abraham, The Story of Jacob and Esau*, panels from the East Doors (“Gates of Paradise”), 1425–1452, Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, Florence.

*Self-Portrait*, from the East Doors (“Gates of Paradise”), 1425–1452, Baptistery, Florence.

Giorgio Vasari:

*View of Florence*, detail, 16<sup>th</sup> century, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.

Giuseppe Zocchi:

*Procession Past the Baptistery*, 1754.

### **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapters 3, 7.

Hartt, chapters 6, 7, 10.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

King, Ross. *Brunelleschi’s Dome*. New York and London: Penguin Books, 2000.

Seymour, Charles Jr. *Sculpture in Italy: 1400–1500*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976. Pelican History of Art.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. How would you characterize Lorenzo Ghiberti’s artistic style?
2. How did the ideals of Brunelleschi’s architecture affect the development of Quattrocento art?

## Lecture Four

### Donatello and Luca della Robbia

**Scope:** Not merely the greatest Florentine sculptor of the period, Donatello (1386–1466) was the most influential visual artist in Italy in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and has remained one of the most admired figures in the history of Western art. Although we know very little about his personal life, the range of expression that emerges from his art is remarkable. He can be heroic, stern, sensual, and enigmatic. He can create striking emblems of power and deeply moving representations of religious subjects. The individuality of the heads that he models suggests their intellect, and his ability to render figures in motion, whether measured or violent, convinces us that they are of our world. All this is part of the new humanism of the Renaissance and is in marked contrast to the stylizations and generalizations of late-medieval art. Donatello conveyed the full measure of man, now impressively noble, now pathetically vulnerable. In this lecture, we will trace his career until he moved to Padua in 1443, where he remained for 10 years.

Luca della Robbia (1400–1482) is too seldom recognized as one of the great sculptors of his day, in large part because he is lumped together with the rest of his extended family as a maker of glazed terracotta sculptures more often popularly considered decorative art. He did make these works, and they are splendid, but his work as a sculptor in stone is the true mark of his genius. We must content ourselves here with a close look at his *Cantoria*, or “singing gallery,” produced for the Florence Cathedral in direct competition with Donatello, to appreciate his memorable achievement.

### Outline

- I. Donato di Niccolò Bardi, known as Donatello, apprenticed with Ghiberti and worked on the preparation of his north doors for the Baptistery but was of a completely different artistic temperament.
  - A. The great work of his early career was the marble *Saint George* for a niche on Orsanmichele. This guild church, whose interior we have seen in Lecture One, had 14 exterior niches, and the



individual guilds that controlled them were under directions from the city fathers to commission sculptures to fill the spaces. The Armorer's Guild aptly chose the warrior figure of Saint George to represent them, and Donatello was commissioned to carve it, as well as the relief scene below, which shows *Saint George Slaying the Dragon*.

1. Possibly begun around 1410, the statue was completed by 1415. The heroic appearance of the figure was immediately striking, as was its "marvelous suggestion of life bursting out of the stone" (Vasari), a quality rare in late-Gothic sculpture that became a hallmark of the Renaissance. The widespread legs and the central axis of the shield lead the viewer's eye to the vigilant, intelligent head. It was originally crowned by a real helmet and holding a real sword, both fashioned by the Armorer's Guild.
  2. The relief sculpture was made afterward (1415–1417) and is as remarkable in its pictorial subtlety as the statue is in its volumetric boldness. The extremely shallow carving, especially in the background with an arcade and a landscape, is called *rilievo schiacciato*, or "flattened relief," and has no precedent. It is Donatello's means of emulating effects of light and atmosphere and is still impressive, despite severe erosion. The influence of this invention has already been seen in Ghiberti's second set of Baptistery doors.
- B.** In the mid-1420s, Donatello was at work on two projects: statues of prophets for the Campanile ("bell tower") of the Cathedral of Florence and a relief sculpture for the baptismal font of the Cathedral of Siena.
1. At about the time he completed the *Saint George*, Donatello began a project that would continue for 20 years: a series of prophets for the famous Campanile (designed by Giotto a century before) of the Duomo. Removed from their niches 60 years ago (and replaced by copies), they are now in the cathedral museum (Museo dell'Opera del Duomo). One of the most moving is the so-called *Jeremiah* (c. 1427–1435), whose exceptionally voluminous drapery and large-featured head projected to the spectator some 30 feet below the niche. Donatello was inspired by the realism of Roman portrait busts but infuses his prophet's features with a potent emotionalism

quite appropriate to the thundering words of those Old Testament figures. The actual identity of Donatello's prophets is unknown, and "*Jeremiah*" retains his traditional name out of convenience.

2. Four sculptors contributed bronze reliefs to the Siena baptismal font. Donatello's subject was the *Feast of Herod*, and he executed it around 1425. He followed the medieval method of continuous narrative, in which several episodes from a story are shown in the same composition. But to organize these episodes, Donatello utilized linear, one-point perspective—learned from Brunelleschi, whom he had accompanied to Rome to study ancient art—and a precisely recreated Roman architectural setting. The receding diagonal lines (*orthogonals*) of the floor design converge toward a point (the *vanishing point*) just above the center of the square panel, near to the eye level of the bronze figures.
3. Donatello has shown the dramatic climax of the story, when the head of Saint John the Baptist is presented to Herod, causing the king and others to draw back in shock. Because the center, where the vanishing point lies, is vacated, a tension exists between the geometric pull of the perspective system and the spasmodic actions of the figures. The artist has used the system not merely for spatial logic but for emotional effect. This relief was the most consistent application of one-point perspective up till then, and we will discuss the invention further in the next lecture.

II. The Choir Galleries (*Cantorie*) of Luca della Robbia and Donatello: *Cantoria* signifies a choir gallery in Italian, and two great marble examples were made for the Florentine Duomo. In virtually head-to-head competition, Donatello and Luca della Robbia produced two of the most beautiful sculptural ensembles of the Renaissance.

- A. Luca della Robbia (1400–1482), associated in the modern mind with the glazed terracotta sculptures in which his family specialized for generations, is in fact, one of the major sculptors of the Renaissance. Only time restricts us to a single work, the *Cantoria*, made between 1431 and 1438. It was his most important commission to date.

1. The *Cantoria* is a marble gallery 17 feet in length that was placed over the door to the left sacristy in the cathedral.

Singers and instrumentalists would have performed from this elegant perch.

2. The decoration consists of 10 panels depicting children as dancers, singers, and instrumentalists. Eight square panels are in two levels on the front, and one rectangular panel is on each end. The front panels are separated by pilasters and brackets, and on the three horizontal bands (two *stylobates* and a frieze) is inscribed the text of Psalm 150, which reads in part: “Praise ye the Lord.../Praise him with the timbrel and dance:/Praise him with stringed instruments and organs./Praise him upon the loud cymbals./Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord.”
3. The unsurpassed charm and complete evocation of youthful absorption in music-making is timeless, and Luca’s skill at rendering adolescent fleshiness and suggesting contrasting personalities never ceases to delight.

**B.** Donatello was in Rome when Luca began carving his gallery and, upon his return, was commissioned for a complementary *Cantoria* (1433–1439) to be placed over the right sacristy door.

1. Even longer than Luca’s gallery (nearly 19 feet), it was completely different in conception. Instead of single panels, Donatello created a continuous frieze of dancing children placed against a mosaic background and behind five pairs of colonnettes on the upper level. In addition, heavily elaborate decoration derived from his recent study of antiquity is employed on the architectural surfaces of the gallery.
2. Instead of Luca’s instantly recognizable neighborhood boys, Donatello treats us to a melee of rushing, colliding children, some of them winged, all of them belonging more to Roman mythology than to Florentine reality.

**III.** Donatello’s most famous work is probably his bronze *David*, created in the 1430s but difficult to date more exactly.

- A.** It is sometimes academically summarized as the first life-size, free-standing, fully in the round, nude statue since antiquity. But this would not matter as much if the work had little aesthetic merit.
- B.** Its aesthetic qualities are apparent: It is sensuously and elegantly modeled, expressively posed, and superbly cast in bronze.
- C.** David is shown after he has vanquished Goliath and decapitated him—the head lies beneath his left foot. Why David should be

nude is unclear, although if he were totally nude it would seem obvious that Donatello was borrowing the nudity of classical heroes for his biblical character. The hat and boots call attention to the nudity and to the effeminate, androgynous appearance of the boy. Although it is speculative, there is some evidence that Donatello was homosexual and that the boy David—with the head of the mature Goliath—had a personal symbolic significance. What is seductive for one viewer may be disturbing for another.

### **Works Discussed:**

Luca della Robbia:

*Cantoria*, 1431–1438, Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, Florence.

Donatello:

*Cantoria*, 1433–1439, Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, Florence.

*David*, 1430s, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

*The Feast of Herod*, c. 1427, Baptistry, Siena.

*The Prophet Jeremiah*, c. 1427–1435, Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, Florence.

*Saint George*, c. 1415, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

*Saint George Slaying the Dragon*, c. 1417, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

### **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapters 3, 6–7.

Hartt, chapters 7, 10.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Bertelà, Giovanna Gaeta. *Donatello*. New York: Scala/Riverdale, 1991.

Pope-Hennessy, John. *Introduction to Italian Sculpture*. Part II: *Italian Renaissance Sculpture*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. London: Phaidon Press, 2000.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. What are the similarities and differences between Donatello’s and Luca della Robbia’s *Cantoria* sculptures?
2. What are the different kinds of relief sculpture?

## Lecture Five

### Masaccio

**Scope:** The founder of Renaissance painting, granted a too brief life, Tommaso di Ser Giovanni, known to all by his nickname, Masaccio, will be our focus for two lectures. Masaccio (1401–1428) painted for no more than 11 or 12 years, and the works for which he is famous were created in less than 6. Like all such short-lived prodigies, his career fascinates and astonishes. First, we shall examine his long dismantled and dispersed Pisa Altarpiece, in which medieval taste survives in the gold background his patron desired. Then, we will compare his work with that of his spiritual forbearer, Giotto, the artist whose simple, massive figures and spiritual gravitas provided the essential model. Later, we shall examine his monumental fresco of *The Trinity* for Santa Maria Novella. Among the aspects of that work to be studied is his introduction of one-point perspective, which he certainly learned from his friend Filippo Brunelleschi.

### Outline

- I. In the short space of about a dozen years, the artist called Masaccio established the course of painting in the early Renaissance and became an exemplar for later generations.
  - A. Tommaso di Ser Giovanni (1401–1428) was nicknamed Masaccio. Because in Italian *accio* is a derogatory suffix roughly meaning “ugly” or “brutish,” his nickname is sometimes rendered as “big ugly Tom” or similar formulations.
  - B. He was born in an Arno River valley town not far from Florence. At 20, he joined the painters’ guild in Florence and, in 1425, joined the painter Masolino who was at work on the decoration of a chapel for the Brancacci family in the Florentine Church of Santa Maria del Carmine. It was to become Masaccio’s most famous work, and we will study it by itself in the next lecture.
    1. While Masaccio was working on the Brancacci Chapel, he was commissioned to paint a polyptych (1426) in Pisa for the Church of the Carmine there. A remarkable ensemble, it was later displaced from the altar and taken apart, its various

components eventually scattered to museums in four countries.

2. The *Madonna Enthroned with Child* is solemnly monumental and deeply affecting, despite its damaged state. The painting ought to be compared with Giotto's painting of the same subject, known as the *Ognissanti Madonna*, done more than a century before. Then, it becomes clear that Masaccio has revived the imposing humanity that Giotto had announced at the beginning of the Trecento.
3. The summit of the Pisa Altarpiece was crowned by a *Crucifixion*, remarkable both for the foreshortened, neckless head of Christ, which can only properly have been seen from sharply below, and for the thrilling red cloak of the Magdalen at the foot of the cross. Only about 30 inches high, this panel has the breadth and heft of a much larger painting.

II. Back at work in Florence, Masaccio also took on a commission for an extraordinary fresco in the left-side aisle of Santa Maria Novella, the *Trinity* (1428). We may presume that it was painted shortly before his departure for Rome.

- A. The fresco, nearly 22 feet high, consists of an elaborate fictive architectural setting, similar to an elevated chapel. Everything is governed by Brunelleschi's perspective system and the various levels of reality that can be achieved through it.
- B. A brief explanation of one-point perspective follows:
  1. Linear or scientific perspective is a way of constructing a pictorial space in which three-dimensional objects are placed in recession to create a microcosm of the real world.
  2. Pictorial space is a separate "picture world" and may also be thought of as an extension of the real world of the viewer. The figures and objects depicted in spatial recession are also subject to the rules of perspective, called *foreshortening* in this context.
  3. Because the pictorial space is constructed with lines, the system is called *linear perspective*. The horizontal lines, for instance of floor tiles, parallel to the picture plane are called *transversals*. The diagonal lines receding into the picture space are called *orthogonals* and recreate the way parallel

- lines in the real world (e.g., railroad tracks) are perceived by the eye, that is, as if they were converging in the distance.
4. The point at which the orthogonals meet is called the *vanishing point* and is on the horizon line, usually near the center of the picture.
  5. The vanishing point corresponds to the spectator's viewpoint, and that is why the pictorial space appears to be an extension of the viewer's real space. Leon Battista Alberti, the architect who first published a formulation of these principles in 1435–1436, further likened the picture surface to a window, and Renaissance perspective did enable the illusion of a window onto the world.
- C. In his *Trinity*, Masaccio applied perspective principles consistently and imaginatively. In the following description, understand that everything is, in fact, a painted illusion on a single flat surface.
1. At the bottom level, facing the viewer, is a tomb with a skeleton and a motto about the mortality of mankind. Above that appears an elaborate architectural construction with six figures. The architecture consists of a barrel-vaulted chapel seen through an arch supported by two columns. The receding ribs of the coffered barrel vault are the principle orthogonals that control the perspective space in this painting. The chapel is flanked by giant pilasters topped by an elaborate cornice.
  2. In the plane nearest the viewer, two figures kneel in front of the pilasters on a step that is lower than the floor of the chapel. Inside the chapel is a cross with the crucified Christ flanked by the Madonna and Saint John the Evangelist. The two standing figures, being on a higher level, are seen more sharply foreshortened than are the kneeling figures. The figure of Christ seems to be in approximately the same plane as the Madonna and Saint John.
  3. The sixth figure is God the Father, whose feet may be seen on a ledge that seems to be at the back of the chapel, but whose hands support the arms of the cross and whose head is also nearly aligned with that of Jesus. Thus, the deity may seem, irrationally, to inhabit two spaces simultaneously. This is arguable, but that God appears to loom within the chapel and is not constrained by it is unarguable.

4. The dove of the Holy Spirit, between the heads of the Father and the Son, is easy to miss in reproductions: With head down and wings swept up, it looks like the collar of a white tunic. In the *Trinity*, the mastery of perspective is complete, as is Masaccio's understanding of its expressive potential.

### **Works Discussed:**

Giotto:

*Ognissanti Madonna: Enthroned Madonna and Child with Angels and Saints*, c. 1305–1310, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*Meeting of Joachim and Anna at the Golden Gate*, c. 1305, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, Padua.

Masaccio:

*The Madonna Enthroned with Child* (from the Pisa Altarpiece), 1426, National Gallery, London.

*Crucifixion* (from the Pisa Altarpiece), 1426, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples.

*Adoration of the Magi* (from the Pisa Altarpiece), 1426, Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

*Saint Andrew* (from the Pisa Altarpiece), 1426, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

*The Trinity*, c. 1428, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

### **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapter 4.

Hartt, chapter 8.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Alberti, L. B. *On Painting*. Rev. ed. Trans. and with an introduction by John R. Spencer. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966.

Casazza, Ornella. *Masaccio*. New York: Scala/Riverside, 1990.

Cole, Bruce. *Masaccio and the Art of Early Renaissance Florence*. Bloomington, IN, 1980.

Ladis, Andrew. *The Brancacci Chapel, Florence*. New York: George Braziller, 1993.



**Questions to Consider:**

1. What was the influence of Giotto's painting on that of Masaccio? (And how do their styles differ?)
2. Can you outline the basic "rules" of linear perspective?

## Lecture Six

### Masaccio—The Brancacci Chapel

**Scope:** Masaccio's most famous ensemble, the Brancacci Chapel in Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence, soon became and has remained a place of pilgrimage for artists and art lovers. This lecture will examine the principal frescoes created here between about 1424 and 1428, with special attention to their melding of style and narrative content. Masaccio undertook the project together with Masolino, a slightly older painter with whom he sometimes worked. Masolino left for an important job abroad, and Masaccio himself left the Carmine chapel unfinished when he went to Rome in 1428, surely intending to return. But he died there, the Brancacci patron was exiled in 1432, and the chapel remained unfinished until the 1480s. It suffered greatly in ensuing centuries, but a thorough restoration (finished in 1988) has given us a better idea of its original appearance. It is the first fresco cycle since those of Giotto to fully deserve the adjective *monumental*. Masaccio revived Giotto's powerful figure style but with a more convincing flexibility of pose and movement that reflected the new humanism of the early Renaissance.

### Outline

- I. In the mid-1420s, the Florentine Church of Santa Maria del Carmine, across the Arno from the city center, a chapel under the patronage of the Brancacci family (silk merchants), was under decoration. Felice Brancacci, the recently returned Florentine ambassador in Cairo, had probably commissioned the well-regarded painter Masolino ("little Tom"—his proper name was Maso di Cristofano Fini) to begin work on a fresco cycle in the chapel in early 1424. Masolino (1383–1440 or 1447) was joined by the much younger Masaccio in the following year.
  - A. The subject of the cycle is the life of Saint Peter. Peter, as the first pope, was associated with the Guelph (papal) party, then dominant in Florence. In addition, the chapel had been founded in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century by Piero Brancacci and dedicated to his patron saint, Peter.

- B. The chapel is in the right (south) transept of the church. It has undergone significant changes since the Quattrocento. The worst event was a disastrous fire in the church in 1771 that damaged the frescoes and nearly led to their destruction until Florentine artists protested.
  - C. The walls of the chapel are divided into two tiers, which are then subdivided into narrative fields. Thus, two scenes appear on each of the narrow, projecting entrance walls; two wide scenes on each of the long, lateral chapel walls; and two scenes on each side of the altar on the end wall. Other 15<sup>th</sup>-century paintings on the end wall and in the vault were destroyed long ago.
  - D. Of these dozen extant scenes, Masolino was responsible for three, Masaccio for five and a half, and later, around 1484, Filippino Lippi for three and a half (Lecture Seventeen).
    - 1. Masolino first frescoed the vault, but those paintings are lost. Then, he began at the opening into the chapel, at the top of the right-hand pier, where he painted the *Temptation of Adam and Eve*. He then painted the double scene on the long right wall, *The Healing of the Cripple* and *The Raising of Tabitha*.
    - 2. Masolino painted scenes adjacent to the altar, of which only the *Preaching of Saint Peter* survives. By this time, it is assumed that Masaccio had joined him, perhaps first as assistant, then as full collaborator on the project. After painting half of another large scene, Masolino left Florence in September 1425 to spend nearly two years in Hungary. He never returned to work in the Brancacci Chapel.
- II. We do not know whether it was Masolino or the patron Felice Brancacci who invited Masaccio to work in the Brancacci Chapel, but it must have been early in 1425.
- A. Masolino probably already had worked with Masaccio in 1424, collaborating on an altarpiece of *The Madonna and Child with Saint Anne* (Florence, Uffizi Gallery). He would, therefore, have been keenly aware of the decided difference in their styles. Masaccio's manner was bolder and more sweeping in conception than the delicacy of the International Gothic style that still persisted in Masolino's work. In any case, they seem to have worked together efficiently and amicably.

B. There is no evidence that Masaccio had ever painted in fresco before the Brancacci Chapel, and it is a sobering thought that this masterpiece may have been his first essay in a demanding medium.

1. *Fresco* simply means “fresh” in Italian. The technique involves painting on a shallow layer of freshly troweled wet plaster (the *intonaco*) with water-based pigments, which penetrate into the plaster. The difficulty derives from the necessity of rapid execution, before the plaster sets overnight, allowing one working day. The area that can be covered is, thus, called a *giornata* (“day” or “day’s work”) and demands that discrete, rational areas be painted at one time: a head or an entire body, for instance, or a landscape feature. Because it is difficult to match the pigments in the next batch of plaster, it is important that the differences in tone are not visually disruptive.
2. The great advantage of the medium is permanence, because the color is in the wall, part of it. However, certain pigments, usually azurites (blues), were too expensive to be used in large, diluted quantities and were painted *secco* (“dry”) onto the surface of the dried plaster, as were some details and subtle effects. *Secco* painting is subject to abrasion or flaking and sometimes disappears entirely. *Fresco* painting is almost always done from the top of the wall downward to avoid having paint fall on finished work below.

III. We will look at four of Masaccio’s frescoed scenes in the Brancacci Chapel: *The Expulsion*, *The Tribute Money*, *Saint Peter Baptizing the Neophytes*, and *Saint Peter Healing with His Shadow*.

A. On the wall opposite Masolino’s *The Temptation of Adam and Eve*, Masaccio painted *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*. The contrast is remarkable, stylistically and emotionally, and the *Expulsion* became famous for the intensity and humanity of the grief that Masaccio expressed. The two scenes of Adam and Eve must also be understood as integral to the meaning of the other painted stories in the chapel, all of which are from the life of Saint Peter. The overriding theme of the chapel is salvation, and the scenes from Peter’s life are the response to and redemption from the Original Sin of Adam and Eve.

- B.** The *Tribute Money* is the largest of the scenes completed by Masaccio and striking in choice of subject, composition, and richness of expression.
1. The biblical subject is told only in the Gospel of Matthew (17:24–27): Jesus and his apostles were approached by a local tax collector in Capernaum and asked to pay the tax for the temple. Peter reacted angrily, but Jesus instructed him to go to the lake, where he would catch a fish that would have a coin in its mouth. This was to be given to the collector. Not to be confused with the passage in Matthew 22—“Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s...”—this story is not a common subject in narrative painting, and it has been persuasively suggested that it directly related to the imposition of the Catasto, an equitable tax for defense against the invading armies of the Duke of Milan.
  2. The three-part composition, which repeats the figure of the tax collector twice and that of Peter three times, has been likened to an open-air triptych.
  3. The powerful figures and faces in this scene have sources in ancient Roman art, in Giotto, and in Donatello.
- C.** Masaccio’s three scenes near the altar include two of the most moving.
1. *The Baptism of the Neophytes* is placed on the upper tier to the right of the altar. The scene represents the story told in Acts, when Peter preaches in Jerusalem on Pentecost and 3,000 are converted and baptized. Masaccio places the scene in a landscape of barren hills stretching into the distance that is suggestive of the Apennines near the artist’s birthplace. The two nude neophytes can be ranked among the finest early-Renaissance renderings of the nude, but it is more remarkable that with only a few contrasting figures, Masaccio manages to suggest the inner fervor of conversion.
  2. The lower register to the left of the altar shows another subject rare in art: *Saint Peter Healing with His Shadow*. It is drawn from a few brief lines in Acts (5:12–14), in which it is stated that believers “brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.” It implies the hope of healing but does not claim that it occurred. From

this suggestion, Masaccio imagined and designed one of the most powerful frescoes in the chapel. We have no idea how the *program*—the choice of subjects—originated. It is not possible that Masaccio or Masolino had decided on the scenes to be shown any more than they chose Peter as the subject. But the sources and documents are silent on who may have done so, whether Felice Brancacci or a learned advisor.

3. In 1428, having completed the *Trinity* fresco in Santa Maria Novella but not the frescoes in the Brancacci Chapel, Masaccio left Florence for Rome. Perhaps the money ran out, perhaps he was summoned to Rome by the pope—all we know is that the fresco he was then engaged on was less than half finished (he had painted *Saint Peter Enthroned as First Bishop of Antioch*) and would remain so for more than half a century. Masaccio died in Rome, at the age of 26, having permanently altered the course of Renaissance painting.

### **Works Discussed:**

Giotto:

*The Kiss of Judas*, c. 1305, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, Padua.

Masaccio:

*The Expulsion, The Tribute Money, Saint Peter Baptizing the Neophytes, Saint Peter Healing with His Shadow*, c. 1425–1428, Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence.

Masolino:

*The Temptation of Adam and Eve*, c. 1424–1425, Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence.

### **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapter 4.

Hartt, chapter 8.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Alberti, L. B. *On Painting*. Rev. ed. Trans. and with an introduction by John R. Spencer. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966.

Casazza, Ornella. *Masaccio*. New York: Scala/Riverside, 1990.

Cole, Bruce. *Masaccio and the Art of Early Renaissance Florence*. Bloomington, IN, 1980.

Ladis, Andrew. *The Brancacci Chapel, Florence*. New York: George Braziller, 1993.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Can you briefly describe the fresco technique?
2. How did Masaccio organize the composition of *The Tribute Money*?

## Lecture Seven

### Fra Angelico and Fra Filippo Lippi

**Scope:** Both of these artists evince a gentle, lyrical quality in much of their work. They were the most important painters in Florence after the death of Masaccio. Fra Angelico (c. 1400–1455) spent most of his career in the service of the Dominican order, first in nearby Fiesole, where he was born, then in the monastery of San Marco in Florence, today a museum of his art. The most fascinating aspect of his painting is his ability to switch between a late-medieval style, complete with brilliant gold backgrounds, and a more realistic Renaissance manner, depending on the demands of the commission. Fra Filippo Lippi (c. 1406–1469) was placed in a Carmelite monastery by his poor parents and took vows at an early age. The monastery was the one centered on Santa Maria del Carmine, and Giorgio Vasari, in his 16<sup>th</sup>-century *Lives of the Artists*, asserted that it was watching Masaccio at work in the Brancacci Chapel there that determined Filippo to become an artist. He was an irresponsible young man, however, often failing in his artistic contractual obligations and in his monastic vows. Famously, he fathered children with a nun, married her, and left the monastery, although he continued to sign himself Frater Philippus. His paintings combine charm and inward quietness in equal measure.

### Outline

- I. Nothing is known about the early training of Fra Angelico. Born Guido di Pietro in Fiesole above Florence, he led a straightforward, outwardly uneventful life as a painter for the Dominican Order to which he belonged. A contemporary writer dubbed him “the angelic painter.”
  - A. Once thought to have been born in 1387, he is now believed to have been about the same age as Masaccio. Already painting as a layman by 1417, he soon entered monastic life as Fra Giovanni da Fiesole, where he lived in the friary for many years.
  - B. He obviously absorbed the International Gothic style, as exemplified by Lorenzo Monaco, which would have remained especially popular in the conservative monastic communities, and



his work reflects the influence of Ghiberti and Masolino, but he also would have seen Masaccio's achievements when they were new. These stylistic options all seem to have appealed to him, and his work is marked by the ability to switch between current styles according to the demands of the commission. His most extensive work was done for San Marco, the Dominican monastery in Florence, which he decorated throughout.

- C. Fra Angelico painted numerous versions of the *Annunciation* that are similar in composition, though different in other respects. The painting in the Prado (c. 1430–1432) is divided into three nearly equal segments, with the principal scene set into a double arcade at the right. The archangel and the Virgin each sit within a single arch, directly facing each other and gently substantial in their physical presence. They incline their bodies symmetrically toward each other, the radiant pink of the angel's robe contrasting with the deep blue of the Virgin's cloak. At the left, in a delicately flowered lawn, Adam and Eve are seen as they are expelled from Paradise. Their Fall is atoned by the Incarnation implicit in the Annunciation.
- D. Fra Angelico's large altarpiece of the *Deposition* (c. 1435) completed a commission begun by Lorenzo Monaco painted for the Church of Santa Trinita. Lorenzo painted only the Gothic pinnacles and the flanking pilasters of the framework before his death in 1425. Fra Angelico's painted scene within is a successful attempt to place volumetric, columnar figures in a coherent space that includes the lovely landscape beyond. There is no middle ground, only near and far, but the poetic landscape, with Jerusalem on the left and Tuscan hills on the right, is rendered in the same perspectival continuum as the foreground, and the artist uses the triple arcade of the frame to effectively organize the hushed emotional drama. It is organized as well by the rhythmic placement of tones of blue and red.
- E. Between 1430 and 1435, Angelico painted two versions of the *Coronation of the Virgin*, at first glance quite similar yet with important differences.
  - 1. The earlier version, painted for the Dominican convent in Fiesole, now in the Louvre, was probably painted between 1430 and 1432 and stands about 7 feet high. Although the majority of the crowd of saints and angels are little more than

heads arranged in serried rows, the kneeling foreground figures are fully solid creations in the manner of Masaccio. They kneel on a tiled pavement on a perspective plan, and the tiered throne that rises beyond them is as solid as it is opulent. The kneeling Madonna and the Christ who crowns her are equally of the physical world.

2. The slightly later version now in the Uffizi (c. 1435) was painted for the church of Sant'Egidio (later Santa Maria Nuova) and is only about half the size of the Louvre painting, but the significant contrast is the mystical, ethereal glow of the painting. Here, the attendant figures are placed on clouds, as are Christ and the Madonna, and brilliant golden rays fan out like swords above and below the divine group. Although the painting is not without elements of Renaissance style, Fra Angelico has chosen to endow the heavenly court with a visionary appearance closer to late-medieval painting.
  3. This ability to consciously alternate between Renaissance and Gothic modes, possibly depending on the desires of his patrons, is a striking aspect of the art of Fra Angelico.
- F. Between 1438 and 1440, Fra Angelico painted a very large altarpiece in a fully Renaissance style for the rebuilt Church of San Marco. Because Cosimo de' Medici was the principal patron and because the patron saints of the Medici were the physician martyrs Cosmas and Damian, these two saints were prominently featured in the altarpiece.
1. Although the altarpiece is damaged from an early cleaning, the small *predella* panels escaped its fate. One of those shows the *Beheading of Saints Cosmas and Damian*; it is a painting of delicate beauty that underscores the gruesome martyrdom.
  2. More than two victims are present, because the three younger brothers of the saints were also executed. With a naïve literalism that is more horrifying than expressionistic exaggeration, the heads of Cosmas and Damian (in the foreground) still retain their haloes; the just-decapitated brother still kneels with blood spouting from his neck, while his head has already joined those of his brothers. Of the youngest boys, one is about to receive the blow, his upright body echoing the trees behind him, while the last, still waiting, has even elicited a soldier's sympathy. There is a kind of pre-

cinematic progression of murders in the staging of the five brothers.

3. The city wall and the curving road lead from the foreground executions, familiar to Florentine viewers, into the equally familiar gentle Tuscan landscape. The fluid transition and the unity of the landscape parts mark an advance in the representation of painted space.

**II.** *The Adoration of the Magi*, a well-known and much-discussed painting in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, introduces Fra Filippo Lippi and an apparent “collaboration” between him and Fra Angelico.

- A. It has been suggested that Fra Angelico designed and painted some of the work before he was called to Rome by the pope in 1445 and that it fell to Fra Filippo Lippi to complete the painting, possibly after Angelico’s death. The not-so-simple question, one of connoisseurship, is who painted which parts.
- B. It is now generally agreed that the Madonna and Child are the work of Fra Angelico. It seems likely that he had laid out much of the composition and, perhaps, painted in many parts, at least in basic outline. After inheriting the work, Fra Filippo Lippi may have revised many of Fra Angelico’s figures and added others of his own invention, and the final painting may contain more passages by Lippi than by Fra Angelico.
- C. The round format, called a *tondo*, was a popular form in the Renaissance. In this work, the composition is brilliantly adapted to the tondo, with the procession of persons led by the Magi entering through an arch at the upper left, following the curve of the frame to the holy family at the lower center, and proceeding along a steep path to exit the scene at the top right.
- D. Many symbols are incorporated into the painting. Most noticeable may be the large peacock, a symbol of immortality, perched on the roof of the stable, where the arrangement of supporting trusses simultaneously suggests the cross and the Trinity.

**III.** Placed in the Carmelite monastery as an orphan, Filippo Lippi took vows there in 1421. His irregular life—broken vows, children by the nun Lucrezia, their marriage—has made him a natural subject for imaginative speculation.

- A. In Robert Browning's mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century dramatic monologue, the painter says, "You should not take a fellow eight years old/And make him swear to never kiss the girls." But Lippi was probably 15 then, and soon after, as Vasari was surely correct in asserting, he watched Masaccio at work in the Brancacci Chapel in the monastery church and decided to become a painter. He may even have assisted in small ways as Masolino and Masaccio worked there.
- B. The influence of Fra Angelico was added to that of Masaccio, poetic delicacy added to significant form, and the final ingredient was Lippi's innately simple, direct style. Here, Browning was right on target: "If you get simple beauty and nought else,/You get about the best thing God invents."
- C. The Barbadori Altarpiece, begun in 1437, is a handsome and assured painting of the *Madonna and Child with Saints and Angels*.
1. The painting is named for the family that commissioned it for a chapel in Santo Spirito.
  2. The frame, with three round Renaissance, not pointed Gothic, arches dividing the picture space, contrasts with Lorenzo Monaco and Fra Angelico's slightly earlier *Deposition*. The arcade is more integrated into the pictorial space, because the scene is set in an interior and because it corresponds to the dense, intimate figure groupings. The unity of the saints and angels with the Madonna and Child make this an early example of the *Sacra Conversazione* ("sacred conversation"), in which the psychological connectedness of all the figures departs from the isolation typical of Trecento painting.
  3. In contrast to those of Fra Angelico, the haloes of the holy figures in the Barbadori Altarpiece are transparent rather than solid-gold disks. Moreover, Lippi has learned from Masaccio to depict the haloes in foreshortening on the heads, like hats, rather than as circles parallel to the picture plane behind the heads, as Fra Angelico still did.
- D. *The Annunciation* (c. 1440) in the Medici family church of San Lorenzo also integrates an arched frame with the painted architecture of the scene within.
1. Whereas Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* used a central painted column to separate the angel and the Virgin Annunciate, Lippi

places them both in the right half of the panel, while two more angels are placed to the left of the pillar.

2. Lippi uses these angels to draw us into the pictorial world. When we discussed perspective in Lecture Five, we mentioned Leon Battista Alberti, the architect and famous theorist, whose *Della Pittura* (“*On Painting*”), written in 1435, was the first thorough exposition of perspective. His book contained much more, however, including how figures should be posed and composed. In Lippi’s painting, the addition of two angels not required by written authority allows him to invent a variety of different poses, as praised by Alberti: “A painting in which there are bodies in many dissimilar poses is always especially pleasing.” Moreover, the angel at the left is a perfect example of Alberti’s dictum: “...I like to see someone [in a painting] who admonishes and points out to us what is happening there.”
3. That angel provides the initial entry into pictorial space, but he points at the Virgin on the right side, keeping our attention on the figure group. Behind the Virgin, the brightly lit orthogonal of the building on the right leads the eye rapidly to the vanishing point at the end of the deep garden. That vanishing point, however, is located just to the right of the central pillar in the front plane, thus returning our attention immediately to the significant subject of the painting. The complex interaction of space and surface, of movement and counter-movement, is a remarkable feature of Filippo Lippi’s art in this painting and elsewhere.

E. Fra Filippo Lippi is justly famous for his exquisite, lyrical interpretations of the Madonna and Child in various settings. The similarity of many of the faces of these Madonnas may support the supposition that the model was his mistress, the ex-nun Lucrezia; if so, she supplied him with a model that he idealized into a memorable type. Three examples from the mid- to late 1450s, and all in the Uffizi, are characteristic.

1. *The Madonna and Child with Angels* shows the Madonna seated in profile in an elegant Renaissance chair, in front of a window opening onto a distant landscape of mountain and valley. She does not hold the child but places her hands together in prayer while two angels, one looking at the viewer,

the other scarcely glimpsed behind the Christ Child, lift the child up to his mother.

2. *Adoration of the Child with Saints and Angels* is a nocturnal scene in which a seated Joseph and kneeling Mary contemplate the Christ Child who is lying on the hem of the Virgin's garment on the ground. Angels with an inscribed scroll hover at the top, while subsidiary saints flank the scene in the background.
3. The expressive potential of the nocturne is magnified in *Adoration of the Child with the Young Saint John and Saint Romualdo* (a 10<sup>th</sup>-century Benedictine hermit monk). Here, the iconography of the scene is expanded by the inclusion of the hands of God and the Dove of the Holy Spirit to create a mystical Trinity united with the prophecy of the Baptist. A beautiful, shimmering, irrational luminosity suffuses the painting.

### **Works Discussed:**

Fra Angelico:

*The Annunciation*, 1430–1432, Museo del Prado, Madrid.

*Deposition*, c. 1435, Museo di San Marco, Florence.

*The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1430–1432, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

*The Coronation of the Virgin*, c. 1435, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*The Beheading of Saints Cosmas and Damian*, c. 1438–1440, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Fra Angelico and Fra Filippo Lippi:

*Adoration of the Magi*, c. 1445, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Fra Filippo Lippi:

*Madonna and Child with Saints and Angels (The Barbadori Altarpiece)*, begun 1437, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

*The Annunciation*, c. 1440, San Lorenzo, Florence.

*Madonna and Child with Angels*, c. 1455–1460, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*Adoration of the Child with Saints Joseph, Jerome, Mary Magdalene, and Hilarius*, late 1450s, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*Adoration of the Child with Saint John the Baptist and Saint Romualdo*, late 1450s, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

**Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapter 5.

Hartt, chapter 9

**Supplementary Reading:**

Fossi, Gloria. *Filippo Lippi*. New York: Scala/Riverside, 1989.

Hood, William. *Fra Angelico at San Marco*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

Holmes, Megan. *Fra Filippo Lippi, the Carmelite Painter*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

Lloyd, Christopher. *Fra Angelico*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., rev. and enl. London and New York: Phaidon Press, Colour Library, 1992.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Why do you think the Virgin Mary (with or without Jesus) is such a central subject for religious art?
2. Why might an artist (such as Fra Angelico) alternate between the older late-Gothic style and the new Renaissance manner?

## Lecture Eight

### Three Specialists

**Scope:** As Renaissance artists explored the natural world and developed new means of representing it in paint on a flat surface, some of them naturally became especially fascinated with or adept at certain painting techniques. This lecture looks at two or three paintings by each of three artists whose contrasting interests are readily apparent. Paolo Uccello (1397–1475) was devoted to the study of foreshortening and perspective. Andrea del Castagno (c. 1419–1457) found ways to make his figures look almost like painted sculptures. And Domenico Veneziano (c. 1410–1461) brought with him from his native Venice the fascination with color and light that has always typified that city's art, introducing a tonal delicacy and pastel palette that were uncommon in Florence. Of course, their art was not exclusively about one aspect of style, but their specialties nonetheless suggest something of the experimental art laboratory that was Florence in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

### Outline

- I. We have seen that the Renaissance painter's conquest of the visible world through new means of representing it on a two-dimensional surface was a quasi-scientific process, shared by many artists whose individual emphases naturally differed. Many were concerned with perspective, the most radical innovation in Renaissance art.
  - A. For a painter like Paolo Uccello, nothing was as compelling as the construction of a fictive space that seemed a re-creation of real space, in which he could place figures and objects in a measurable spatial relationship to each other.
  - B. For Andrea del Castagno and others, a preoccupation with volume, with sculptural solidity of figures and objects, was paramount.
  - C. Still others, like Domenico Veneziano, were attracted by the potential of color to create atmosphere, an illusion of air surrounding objects, and an effect of distance in a landscape by painting far mountains in a blue haze that emulated their visual experience of reality.



- D. This is not intended to imply that most artists exclusively investigated only one of these pictorial problems but that many of them were specialists in their investigations.

II. Paolo Uccello (1397–1475) received his first training as an assistant in Ghiberti's shop when the first set of Baptistery doors was being developed. He later worked on mosaics in the basilica of San Marco in Venice, and he designed stained glass for the Florentine Duomo. But it is as a painter that he is known, drawn to the art through a fascination with the new science of perspective. Although little survives of his oeuvre, most of that is remarkable for its focus on perspective and foreshortening.

A. *Sir John Hawkwood* (1436), a fresco on a wall of the cathedral in Florence, is Uccello's earliest dated painting. It replaced an earlier fresco commemorating Hawkwood's military success in defeating the Milanese forces of Giangaleazzo Visconti.

1. Originally on the inside wall of the west façade, it was later moved to the north wall.
2. It is an illusionistic image of an equestrian monument, painted in monochrome pigments, which obviously was less costly than an actual stone and bronze monument would have been.
3. John Hawkwood (d. 1394) was an English mercenary soldier, called *condottiere* in Italy, who commanded the Florentine army. His name proved difficult for Italians, who therefore called him Giovanni Acuto.
4. Uccello uses two perspective systems, with different viewpoints, in the painting, in order to balance illusion with aesthetic concerns. The tomb that supports the horse is seen sharply from below, but the horse and rider are seen almost straight on, a concession to the unpleasing view of the horse's belly and a distorted face of Hawkwood that would have resulted from insisting on a single, foreshortened point of view.

B. Three large paintings of battle scenes once decorated a wall of the bedchamber of Lorenzo de' Medici in the Medici Palace, where they were placed end-to-end in a frieze some 10 meters (about 34 feet) long. Recent research indicates that Lorenzo had confiscated them from the Bartolini Salimbeni family, probably between 1479 and 1486.

1. *The Battle of San Romano* (c. 1438–1440), now in the National Gallery, London, typifies the trio. Although representing an engagement with the Sienese forces in 1432, it is more pageant than battle, with brightly caparisoned horses (that is, outfitted with ornamental trappings) and agitated banners distributed rigidly across the painting.
2. The wooden-toy quality of the horses and soldiers stems from the artist's preoccupation with achieving convincingly foreshortened figures within a perspective grid. The orthogonals principally consist of fallen warriors in steep perspective, together with broken lances and pieces of armor.
3. The suspended animation of the foreground figures is replaced in the landscape, where a few soldiers continue to fight, by the delightfully meandering fields and vineyards on a hillside. No sky is visible to counter the busy-ness of the scene, although it is probable that the paintings were originally taller and cut down to fit a new location. Here, it becomes apparent that Uccello, like his teacher Ghiberti, retains stylistic affinities with the International Gothic and its decorative, tapestry-like compositions.
4. There are some portraits among the soldiers, notably the central horseman. He is Niccolò da Tolentino, the Florentine captain, and he is carefully characterized.

**III.** Andrea del Castagno (c. 1419–1457) focused his attention on the human figure, which he painted with a muscular three-dimensionality that is imposing. In addition to the device of foreshortening, he achieved this through powerfully sculptural modeling in which the abrupt shifts from light to dark describe the structure of the body while giving it emotional heft.

- A.** Niccolò da Tolentino (the *condottiere* in Uccello's battle scene) is also the subject of a monochrome fresco by Castagno, simulating sculpture in the manner of Uccello's *Hawkwood* painting. Executed in 1456 for the cathedral as a pendant to the latter, it was also transferred at a later time to canvas and moved to the north wall.
1. The painting is almost convulsively modeled, especially the horse; like Uccello, Castagno uses two perspective systems to make the painting more attractive.

2. It was the artist's last major work before he died of the plague in August 1457.
- B.** Castagno's *Youthful David* (c. 1450), although considerably abraded, still projects a convincingly angular, bony physique—especially in the legs.
1. The painting is a notable survivor of a type that was probably fairly common, because it is actually painted on a leather shield intended for carrying in processions (David was considered a patron or guardian of Florence). Behind the painted surface, the rivets that held the handles in place on the reverse are visible, and the curved support accentuates the physical immediacy of the young hero.
  2. The device of simultaneous narrative, common in medieval art, is used here: Although David has not yet released the stone from his sling, the head of Goliath is already between his feet.
- C.** Earlier than either of the preceding works, Castagno's *Last Supper* (1447) is his masterpiece, but it had no influence on subsequent artists. Frescoed in the Refectory of the Convent of Sant' Apollonia it was condemned to invisibility when the convent was placed under *clausura* (i.e., closed to all but the nuns of the religious community) at about the same time the painting was completed.
1. The painting creates the illusion of another room opening like a stage at the end of the nun's dining hall. A long table stretches across this room with Christ and all the Apostles save Judas seated behind it. Judas is symbolically isolated on the near side of the table.
  2. Although the presentation of the figures is reserved and statuesque, the individual characterizations of the Apostles are remarkable, some interacting, others rapt in thought.
  3. The marble panels of this painted room are used for compositional, rhythmic, and expressive purposes.
- IV.** Little solid information exists on the early life of Domenico Veneziano (c. 1410–1461), but his name reveals his birthplace. Although quite a few Florentine artists spent some time working in Venice, including Uccello and Castagno, they had little impact on Venetian art. Domenico, on the other hand, had a noticeable effect on Florentine painting, although the dating of most of his work is undocumented.

- A. His very Venetian preoccupation was with color that was pale but light-suffused, a palette quite different from the usually more assertive Florentine palette. Using tempera, he created a tonality closer to fresco painting. The emotional effect of his preferred pastel tones is gentle and lyrical, and it makes his paintings seem bathed in air.
- B. His most famous and influential work is the *Saint Lucy Altarpiece*, painted probably around 1445 for Santa Lucia dei Magnoli and now in the Uffizi. About 7 feet square, it depicts the Madonna and Child enthroned in the center of a triple arcade and flanked by two saints on either side: Saint Francis and Saint John the Baptist on the left and Saint Zenobius and Saint Lucy on the right. Zenobius was a 5<sup>th</sup>-century bishop of Florence and was a patron saint of the city, as was Saint John the Baptist.
  1. The visual charm of the painting is matched by its quiet seriousness, and each saint is distinctly and aptly characterized.
  2. The space is shallow but consistently ordered by perspective.
  3. There was a *predella* below the altarpiece, and beneath each of the figures was a small scene corresponding to the saint. Long separated from the large panel, they are now in several museums. The panel depicting *Saint John the Baptist in the Wilderness* is now in the National Gallery, Washington, DC. It is remarkable for the nude figure of the young Baptist, who discards his cloak for the hairshirt that he will wear during his sojourn in the rocky, barren wilderness imagined by Domenico. The figure may have been inspired by Ghiberti's young Isaac on the Baptistry doors.

### **Works Discussed:**

Andrea del Castagno:

*Niccolò da Tolentino*, 1456, Duomo, Florence.

*The Youthful David*, c. 1450, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

*The Last Supper*, 1447, Sant'Apollonia, Florence.

Paolo Uccello:

*Sir John Hawkwood*, 1436, Duomo, Florence.

*The Battle of San Romano*, c. 1438–1440, National Gallery, London.

Domenico Veneziano:

*The Saint Lucy Altarpiece*, c. 1445, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*Saint John the Baptist in the Wilderness*, c. 1445, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

**Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapter 6.

Hartt, chapter 11.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Borsi, Franco, and Stefano Borsi. *Paolo Uccello*. London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1994.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What aspects of style did artists of the early Renaissance experiment with and develop?
2. Why did artists modify the perspective system rather than apply it stringently in their work?

## Lecture Nine

### Donatello and Padua

**Scope:** In 1443, Donatello moved from Florence to Padua, probably to design, model, and oversee the casting of an extraordinary bronze equestrian statue of a military figure known as *Gattamelata*, completed in 1450. Padua was under the rule of Venice, and the *condottiere* fought for the Venetian state. While at work on the statue, Donatello was employed by the Basilica of Sant'Antonio of Padua to create a new high altar for the famous pilgrimage shrine. His work there, mostly in bronze, consisted of freestanding and relief sculpture and is characterized by a new emotional intensity that would influence the sculpture and painting of northern Italy for another generation. In the reliefs, especially, he used the innovations in linear perspective of the Florentine Renaissance to dramatize his narrative scenes in unprecedented fashion. While in Padua, he also carved a wooden sculpture of *Saint John the Baptist* for a chapel in the Frari, the great Franciscan Gothic church in Venice. The expressive intensity of this statue continues what may be called Donatello's "old age" style, and when he returned to Florence in 1453, he soon made another wooden single figure of even greater emotionalism, *Mary Magdalen*, perhaps for the Florentine Baptistery where it long resided. The last work we will examine is the bronze group of *Judith and Holofernes*, at once enigmatic and emotionally overpowering.

### Outline

- I. In the decade between the two simulated equestrian monuments painted by Uccello and Castagno, Donatello created the first great bronze equestrian statue of the Renaissance, the *Gattamelata*, finished in 1450. It was probably this commission that coaxed him to leave Florence for the less congenial city of Padua, where he would live for a decade and where he also designed the moving and greatly influential bronze statues and bronze and stone reliefs for the high altar of the Santo—the Basilica of Saint Anthony, one of the principal pilgrimage shrines in Italy.

- A. *Gattamelata* (“honeyed cat”) was the nickname—possibly evoking a slyly syrupy, overly suave character—of another *condottiere*, Erasmo da Narni (d. 1443), who was in the service of the Venetian Republic, which then included Padua. Not the most successful of military leaders, he has survived in memory far longer than many because of the great monument dedicated to him.
1. The monument is not his tomb (he is buried in the Santo) but a cenotaph placed outside the church in the most important public square in Padua. The head may not even be a portrait but an idealized head in the manner of Roman antiquity.
  2. This is the first surviving life-size bronze equestrian statue since antiquity, and Donatello may have intended a reference and comparison to the famous Marcus Aurelius, a Roman equestrian statue (then thought to represent Constantine the Great).
  3. The statue is an aesthetic triumph in its embodiment of absolute power and confidence and a technical triumph in the successful bronze casting of such a large, complex model.
- B. In 1444, Donatello was commissioned to create a bronze crucifix for the old altar of the Santo. The success of this work may have resulted in the very large commission that followed, for an ensemble of sculptures for a new high altar, to which the *Crucifix* was then also moved.
- C. The work for the high altar of the Santo began in 1446 and continued until 1453. It consists of 7 freestanding sculptures (plus the *Crucifix*) and 22 relief sculptures of various sizes. However, the altar was greatly enlarged and augmented in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the modern reconstitution of Donatello’s altar is conjectural.
1. *The Virgin and Child Enthroned* is placed at the foot of the *Crucifix* in the center of the altar. It is at once hieratic in the Byzantine mode and intensely human in the Renaissance manner.
  2. Four of the large reliefs depict miracles of Saint Anthony of Padua, of which two—the *Miracle of the Believing Donkey* and the *Miracle of the Irascible Son*—are extraordinary demonstrations of the expressive power of perspective construction.

3. The largest relief is limestone, not bronze, and shows the *Entombment of Christ*. Its powerful emotional language single-handedly created a new school of Paduan art.
- II. The Paduan decade saw a marked increase in the emotional potential of Donatello's sculpture. In addition to his advanced age, there were many external events that may have contributed to this expressionistic style.
- A. Back in Florence, he made another wooden statue of even greater emotional intensity, the *Saint Mary Magdalen* (c. 1454–1455).
    1. The emaciated body of the saint, covered only by her hair, is probably explained by the collation of two different Marys: the Magdalen and Mary of Egypt, a hermit saint whose story, like the Magdalen's, is related in the Golden Legend, a medieval compilation of stories about saints.
    2. The terrible Florentine flood of 1366 submerged half the sculpture in the oily mud that flowed through the city. The restoration of the Magdalen necessitated removing later paint from the wood, which revealed that Donatello had painted her haggard body tanned from the desert sun and had gilded her hair.
  - B. Perhaps the most extraordinary sculpture invented by Donatello is his bronze *Judith and Holofernes* (1456).
    1. The Old Testament heroine is shown straddling the dead body of the enemy commander while she severs his head from his body. The sculpture also functioned as a fountain.
    2. Commissioned by the Medici for their palace courtyard, it was placed in front of Palazzo Vecchio after the expulsion of the Medici in 1494 as an ironic warning to tyrants.

### Works Discussed:

Donatello:

*Equestrian Monument of Gattamelata*, 1445–1450, Piazza del Santo, Padua.

*Crucifix*, 1444–1447, High Altar, Sant'Antonio, Padua.

*Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saints Francis and Anthony of Padua*, 1444–1447, Sant'Antonio, Padua.

*The Miracle of the Believing Donkey*, 1446–1450, Sant'Antonio, Padua.



*Miracle of the Irascible Son*, 1446–1450, Sant’Antonio, Padua.

*Entombment of Christ*, 1446–1450, Sant’Antonio, Padua.

*Saint Mary Magdalene*, c. 1454–1455, Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, Florence.

*Judith and Holofernes*, 1456, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.

### **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapters 7, 10.

Hartt, chapters 10, 12.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Bertelà, Giovanna Gaeta. *Donatello*. New York: Scala/Riverdale, 1991.

Pope-Hennessy, John. *Introduction to Italian Sculpture*. Part II: *Italian Renaissance Sculpture*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. London: Phaidon Press, 2000.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. What are the characteristics of Donatello’s Paduan style?
2. What was the significance of Donatello’s equestrian monument *Gattamelata*?

## Lecture Ten

### Piero della Francesca—Individual Works

**Scope:** Piero della Francesca (c. 1420–1492) typified the Renaissance artist in his profound exploration of form, of light and color, and especially of space (he wrote a treatise on perspective), yet he stands noticeably apart from his compatriots in the inimitable aura of his painting. For four centuries, his art was considered not merely atypical of the Quattrocento but essentially provincial, an oddity appreciated by few. Today, it is his apartness that compels our attention, and his special aura has been described as mesmerizing, otherworldly. His figures, even when portraits, seem not to be natives of Tuscany but of a timeless place, and they convey a supra-human grandeur, an inexplicably haunting power. His spatial constructions encompass these grand actors in a visual totality that, to a susceptible viewer, conjures infinity. The first of two lectures will study important works painted between about 1445 and 1470, including his earliest achievements, such as the *Baptism of Christ* and the famous *Resurrection*, and later paintings, such as the *Madonna and Child with Saints*, and the unfinished *Nativity*.

### Outline

- I. Piero della Francesca was born in a Tuscan village, San Sepolcro, then one of the Papal States. Despite an apprenticeship in Florence with Domenico Veneziano and a period in Rome, where he painted for Pius II, he spent much of his life in San Sepolcro, working in smaller centers, including Rimini, Ferrara, Arezzo and Urbino. These places were not negligible, yet because his considerable output is not associated with Florence, Piero was treated as a marginal painter until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- II. A profoundly intellectual painter and mathematician, Piero is now ranked among the greatest artists of the Renaissance. His fresco cycle at Arezzo will be discussed in the next lecture. Among his many memorable individual paintings are three religious subjects.
  - A. In his mid-20s (c. 144,5) he painted a fresco in a small chapel in an isolated cemetery at Monterchi, midway between San Sepolcro

and Arezzo to the south. The subject is the *Madonna del Parto*, the “*Madonna of Childbirth*.” This primal maternal figure is revealed to us as two angels part the curtains of a tent-like structure. The Madonna also parts her outer blue garment to indicate the Incarnation. This seemingly archaic figure touches our imagination, not least because in the original location of the fresco, a chapel in a graveyard, she announces both birth and rebirth.

- B. *The Baptism of Christ* (c. 1450), made for a church in San Sepolcro, now in the cathedral there, is similar to the *Madonna del Parto* in composition and mood, but it is an infinitely more subtle, more nuanced painting. The lovely, pearly palette is comparable to that of Domenico Veneziano. Always, Piero focuses on essentials: the anointing of the calm, statuesque Christ in a crisp Tuscan landscape. He is echoed by the columnar tree, anchoring and arching over the scene. The tree recalls the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because Christ, as the new Adam, redeems the Fall of Man. The painting is suffused with the preternatural stillness that is the great gift of Piero’s art.
- C. *The Resurrection* (late 1450s) impresses many viewers with the terribly convincingly emergence of Christ from the tomb. Our awe is increased when we regard the impassive eyes of this revived Christ, which seem still to have the aura of the grave. Symbolically flanked by the dead of winter and the spring trees in leaf and fronted by the stunned or simply unconscious guards, he is as profoundly classical as any ancient sculpture. This painting was made for the town hall in San Sepolcro, where it remains. *San Sepolcro* means “holy sepulcher.” An early chronicler wrote: “And our land of Borgo San Sepolcro was called the New Jerusalem.”

III. In the 1460s, Piero became closely associated with nearby Urbino and its duke, Federico da Montefeltro; a number of important works are associated with Urbino.

- A. One of these, *The Flagellation* (c. 1460), is still in the palace at Urbino (now the National Gallery of the Marches). It may have been painted for the palace chapel (Cappella del Perdono); we will discuss that in a later lecture on Urbino. The meaning of the painting, in which the titular subject is relegated to the background while three enigmatic figures dominate the foreground, has been much debated.

1. An early 19<sup>th</sup>-century theory held that the painting alluded to the assassination of Oddantonio da Montefeltro, first ruler of Urbino and brother of Federico. Although this theory is not tenable, it still appears in popular guidebooks.
  2. Later, it was proposed that the scourging of Christ in the painting referred to the fall of Constantinople (the city named for the emperor who legitimized Christianity and built Saint Peter's in Rome) to the Moslem armies in 1453.
  3. A recent interpretation suggests instead that the painting's message is consolation and that the blond youth in the foreground stands for two young men, sons of the older men in the trio, who died at about the same time. The conjoining of this personal commemoration with the flagellation of Christ was to emphasize that glory follows tribulation. Therefore, one of the fathers (who are identified by the author of this interpretation) would have been the commissioner of Piero's painting. This is the most complex but also perhaps the most convincing interpretation of this puzzling painting.
- B.** Two striking pure profile portraits of the duke and duchess of Urbino, today in the Uffizi, were commissioned by the duke perhaps around 1465. On the backs of the paintings are allegorical "triumphs" of the pair (to be discussed in Lecture Twenty-Five).
1. The portrait of the duchess, Battista Sforza, suggests a highly intelligent woman of striking self-possession. Her character dominates the understated richness of her costume and accessories. A fertile landscape, as though seen from a balcony, recedes far behind her.
  2. The sense of dominion over the landscape is even stronger in the portrait of Federico da Montefeltro. This is owed to the extraordinary architectural dignity of his battered face. The abrupt depression at the top of his nose resulted from a jousting accident that also cost him his right eye (he is always painted in left profile). Though he may be ill-favored, he is unmistakably noble, and we do not doubt his extraordinary fame as a mercenary soldier whose success brought him great wealth.
- C.** A large altarpiece once (though perhaps not originally) on the high altar of the church of San Bernardino in Urbino depicts the

*Madonna and Child with Saints* in front of an architectural setting of great purity and beauty.

1. It must be a late work, but the date is uncertain.
2. A remarkable feature of the altarpiece is a huge inverted mollusk shell from the tip of which depends a long cord with an ostrich egg at the end. The egg is a symbol of birth and, in the Christian context, also of rebirth. An ostrich egg is a symbol of the Virgin Birth.

IV. The unfinished painting of *The Nativity* (c. 1470–1475), which also suffered from overzealous cleaning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is a hauntingly simple work. Most probably, Piero painted it for himself.

- A. More accurately, it should be called an *Adoration of the Christ Child*. It stresses the humility of the Virgin Mary, adoring the Christ Child, who lies on a cloth on the ground. Musical angels—the more somber cousins of Luca della Robbia’s marble choirboys (Lecture Four)—sing to the newborn child. An unusually relaxed Joseph shows the sole of his foot to the viewer as he talks to the shepherds in front of a strikingly rude stable and barren landscape.
- B. It is painted in oils, in contrast to Piero’s usual tempera. This, together with the particular subject of the kneeling, adoring Madonna, clearly is dependent on Netherlandish painting.

### **Works Discussed:**

Piero della Francesca:

*Madonna del Parto*, c. 1445, Monterchi.

*The Baptism of Christ*, c. 1450, National Gallery, London.

*The Resurrection*, late 1450s, Pinacoteca Comunale, San Sepolcro.

*The Flagellation*, c. 1460, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Palazzo Ducale, Urbino.

*Portraits of Duke Federico da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza, Duchess of Urbino*, and reverse, c. 1465, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*Madonna and Child with Saints*, after 1472, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

*The Nativity*, c. 1470–1475, National Gallery, London.

### **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapter 9.

Hartt, chapter 11.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Bertelli, Carlo. *Piero della Francesca*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

Lavin, Marilyn A. *Piero della Francesca*. Oxford: Phaidon, 1999.

———. *Piero della Francesca: The Flagellation*. Reprint ed. University of Chicago Press, 1990.

———. *Piero della Francesca: San Francesco, Arezzo*. Great Fresco Cycles of the Renaissance Series. New York: George Braziller, 1994.

Voragine, Jacobus de. *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*. 2 vols. Trans. by William Granger Ryan. Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1993.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Can you describe the interaction between Piero della Francesca's style and his emotional/psychological content?
2. What is unusual about Piero's *Flagellation*?

## Lecture Eleven

### Piero della Francesca—Legend of the True Cross

**Scope:** We have reserved the second lecture on Piero for a great fresco cycle, *The Legend of the True Cross* (c. 1453–1454), in the church of San Francesco in Arezzo, the provincial capital of eastern Tuscany, some 40 miles from Florence. Masaccio's Brancacci Chapel cycle was the most significant model for Piero when his opportunity came to assume and complete a commission begun by a late-Gothic artist who died after completing the vault decoration. (Unhappily, also like Masaccio's Brancacci Chapel, the paintings at Arezzo have sustained considerable damage, in this case mainly from water seepage.) The subject assigned to Piero, a 13<sup>th</sup>-century compilation of medieval inventions recounted by Jacobus de Voragine in *The Golden Legend*, involves the supposed history of the cross upon which Jesus was crucified, from its origin in the tree of knowledge through its disappearance and rediscovery by Saint Helena, mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine. It was a fantastic and complex tale and a fabrication, but given that it was seen as one of the principal foundation stones of the Church's authority (because of Constantine's conversion to Christianity and his founding of Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome), the artistic challenge had to be met. It had often been painted before but never with Piero's clarity and forcefulness.

### Outline

- I. Arezzo is not on the usual Italian tour itinerary, but for devotees of Piero, it is essential. The Church of San Francesco in this picturesque town is the site of *The Legend of the True Cross* (c. 1453–1454), which occupies the chancel. Assuming a commission begun by Bicci di Lorenzo, who had died after completing the vault decoration, Piero created one of the benchmarks of Italian Renaissance painting.
  - A. The history of the true cross, retold in Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend* (c. 1260), was a favorite theme of the Franciscans. (Quotations that follow are from the *Golden Legend*.) The most important cycle on the theme before Piero's is that of Agnolo

Gaddi (c. 1380s) in the choir of Santa Croce in Florence, which Piero would have known well.

- B. The walls were subdivided into six large and four small fields on which to paint the legend.

**II.** We will consider six of the fields, which sometimes contain two episodes of the legend.

- A. The arched field on the right wall as we face the tall Gothic window contains *The Death of Adam*, a scene in two parts.
  - 1. At the right, the aged Adam, the first man, is dying. Eve stands behind him and his children stand around him.
  - 2. At the left, Adam is prepared for burial. Although some versions of the legend say that his son Seth planted a branch of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil on his grave, here it is “planted” in his mouth. The great tree that divides the painting may be regarded symbolically as having grown from that branch.
- B. Subsequently, Solomon admired the great tree and had it cut down to use as a pillar in his temple. But it did not fit anywhere, always too long or too short, so it was put to use as a bridge. The next scene in Piero’s cycle (the middle register of the right wall) is the visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon to hear his wisdom, again a scene in two parts.
  - 1. At the left, the queen and her entourage have reached the bridge. She had prophetic powers and she “saw in spirit that the Savior of the world would one day hang upon this very same wood.” In the *Adoration of the Sacred Wood*, she kneels and worships it.
  - 2. *The Meeting of Solomon and Sheba* takes place in the reception portico at the right. Sheba will inform Solomon of her insight and add that “by this man’s death the kingdom of the Jews would be destroyed.” (For this reason, in another scene, Solomon has the wood sunk deeply in a marsh.)
- C. The legend continues with the *Dream of Constantine* in the bottom field to the right of the window. Maxentius, the rival emperor, is poised to invade Rome at the Milvian Bridge.
  - 1. The night before the battle, Constantine had a dream in which he saw “the sign of the cross blazing with fiery brilliance, and



angels standing by, and saying to him: ‘Constantine, in this sign you will conquer.’”

2. Because the upper-left corner of this fresco is damaged, the angelic presence is only partly visible, but the miraculous light that engulfs Constantine’s tent represents the vision. And if there is no cross in the sky, a cross is strongly suggested by the tent pole and the horizontal base of the conical tent top.
- D. The middle register of the left wall—significantly, because of the thematic and compositional parallels, opposite the scenes of Sheba and Solomon—displays the *Discovery of the True Cross* and the *Proving of the True Cross*.
1. Helena, mother of Constantine, determined to locate the true cross. A Jew named Judas knew its location, and Helena confined him in a dry well until he revealed it. When the excavation (left side) uncovers three crosses (including those of the two thieves), the identity of the true cross is unknown.
  2. The body of a young man happens to be carried past at this moment (right side). The three crosses were held over him in succession, and the third brought him back to life, confirming it as the true cross. The wonderfully foreshortened figures enacting this miracle are painted in front of a building of the purest Renaissance geometric abstraction, making the fresco one of Piero’s most famous works.
- E. Piero painted two large battle scenes opposite each other in the bottom register. The *Battle of Maxentius and Constantine* has lost much of its surface to water damage, but the *Battle of Heraclius against Chosroës* (left side) is mostly intact. The event occurs several centuries later than the rest of the cycle and, in fact, is related in a later part of the *Golden Legend* of Voragine.
1. The Persian king Chosroës had occupied Jerusalem and had taken a piece of the Holy Cross that Saint Helena had left there. The Emperor Heraclius met him with an army, dethroned and decapitated him.
  2. The scene is as dense as an actual battle, even more confused than Uccello’s *Battle of San Romano*. But it is packed with riveting and convincing details of war and remarkable observations of character and costume alike.

- F. On the other side of the window from the *Dream of Constantine* is the most ambiguous subject in the cycle. It is an *Annunciation*, certainly, but to whom?
1. It looks like a typical composition for the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary, except that the Dove of the Holy Spirit is missing, as is the lily usually carried by Gabriel.
  2. Some have suggested that it is Saint Helena, not Mary, who stands so regally in a small portico.
  3. But the striking absence from the cycle of the actual crucifixion of Christ, the central event in this *Legend of the True Cross*, leads us back to Mary and to the Incarnation that heralds salvation through the sacrifice on the cross. And, as in the paired fresco of the *Dream of Constantine*, there is an implicit cross in the starkly cruciform architecture of the painting.

### Works Discussed:

Piero della Francesca:

*Legend of the True Cross*, and details: *The Death of Adam*, *Adoration of the Sacred Wood* and the *Meeting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*, *The Dream of Constantine*, *Discovery of the True Cross*, *Proving of the True Cross*, *The Battle of Heraclius and Chosroës*, *The Annunciation*, c. 1453–1454, San Francesco, Arezzo.

### Essential Reading:

Adams, chapter 9.

Hartt, chapter 11.

### Supplementary Reading:

Bertelli, Carlo. *Piero della Francesca*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

Lavin, Marilyn A. *Piero della Francesca*. Oxford: Phaidon, 1999.

———. *Piero della Francesca: The Flagellation*. Reprint ed. University of Chicago Press, 1990.

———. *Piero della Francesca: San Francesco, Arezzo*. Great Fresco Cycles of the Renaissance Series. New York: George Braziller, 1994.

Voragine, Jacobus de. *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*. 2 vols. Trans. by William Granger Ryan. Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1993.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What is the literary source of the *Legend of the True Cross*?
2. Why was the Emperor Constantine significant in Christian art?

## Lecture Twelve

### Pageant of Life in Renaissance Florence

**Scope:** Separated by a generation, Benozzo Gozzoli (1420–1497) and Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449–1494) are linked by their innate interest in decorative painting and, specifically, by a fascination with the civic life of Florence in its public aspect. Therefore, they incorporate portraits into their narrative compositions while continuing the Renaissance exploration of pictorial space, both in landscape and in architectural settings. Gozzoli is best known for his decoration of the private chapel in the Medici Palace. It is a pageant in a jewel box, portraying members of the Medici family and other dignitaries with a wonderful Tuscan landscape behind them. He never again had such an opportunity, but it ranks as one of the most splendid decorative ensembles of mid-century. Ghirlandaio was a more significant artist whose rather early death was greatly mourned, but he left a legacy that seems more admirable with each encounter. In particular, he had the opportunity to paint two large fresco groups in major Florentine churches, Santa Trinità and Santa Maria Novella, where, of course, they were seen by a far wider public than Gozzoli's chapel sequestered in the Medici Palace. In convincingly painted architectural spaces, he staged scenes from biblical and modern church history using actors graced with the features of Florence's leading citizens.

### Outline

- I. The opportunity to decorate ecclesiastical chapels and palatial chambers was one of the distinctive features of the Italian Renaissance. In medieval times, such ensembles existed, but the instances were multiplied in the Quattrocento. In this lecture, we will look at the work of two painters who painted noted decorative ensembles: Benozzo Gozzoli and Domenico Ghirlandaio.
- II. Gozzoli created his masterpiece, the frescoes in the private chapel of the Palazzo Medici (1459), when he was 39 and never equaled it in the remaining 38 years of his long life. A decade earlier, he had assisted Fra Angelico in the decoration of the Chapel of Nicholas V in the

Vatican, and it has been surmised that Angelico might have recommended his former associate to Piero de' Medici for the work in the relatively new palace. Certainly, he had done no remarkable work of his own.

- A. The subject of the decoration, *The Procession of the Magi*, may have derived from the Medici participation in a religious confraternity, the Company of the Magi, or it might have been the opportunity the subject offered to paint a celebratory subject that would permit the inclusion of portraits of the family in a religious guise.
- B. The walls are covered with a continuous landscape through which the Magi and their entourage progress toward Bethlehem. It has long been asserted (and sometimes denied) that the first king is a portrait of Cosimo de' Medici; the second, of John Paleologus, the Byzantine emperor who visited Italy, including Florence, in 1438; and the third, Lorenzo de' Medici. These identifications seem more likely than not, given the obvious portraits (albeit unidentified) that abound in the crowded scenes. The gorgeousness of the colors and the festive mood so unexpected in a chapel would seem to suggest that the Medici were indulging themselves at a time when they felt more at ease in their huge new palace (begun in 1444) that proclaimed their power and presence as never before.

**III.** Domenico Ghirlandaio is a more complex and far more accomplished painter. With his brother Davide and other members of his family, he formed a firm that was the most sought after in Florence for large projects.

- A. He was trained as a metal-worker (his father made golden garlands for fashionable women; Ghirlandaio = garland-maker) before becoming a painter. Yet he was sufficiently highly regarded in his early 30s to be invited to join the distinguished painters working in the newly constructed Sistine Chapel, where he painted the *Calling of Peter and Andrew* (1482). His fresco of the *Last Supper* in the small refectory of San Marco in Florence may have been painted just before he left for Rome.
- B. His principal work was in the decoration of large chapels with pictorial cycles.
  - 1. In Santa Trinità, for the Sassetti Chapel, he painted the altarpiece with the *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1485), a work

- that clearly reveals the impact of a great work of contemporary Flemish art that had recently arrived in Florence—the *Portinari Altarpiece* by Hugo van der Goes.
2. He then frescoed the walls of the chapel with scenes dedicated to Saint Francis and the Franciscan order, including *Honorius III Approves the Franciscan Rule*.
  3. Next, he painted the Cappella Maggiore (the chancel) of Santa Maria Novella with frescoes of the *Life of Mary* and the *Life of Saint John the Baptist* (1485–1490). Many of the scenes are enlivened with contemporary portraits of the Tornabuoni family that commissioned the work and of other Florentine notables.
  4. One of the most well known of the scenes from the *Life of Mary* is the *Birth of the Virgin*. It is a kind of religious genre painting, in that it recreates the ancient story in contemporary Florentine terms. The architecture, costumes, and customs, are all faithful to Quattrocento reality.
  5. Among Ghirlandaio's apprentice-assistants in the last years of his life was Michelangelo, who learned the rudiments of fresco technique from one of its most proficient practitioners.

### **Works Discussed:**

Domenico Ghirlandaio:

*The Last Supper*, c. 1480, Ognissanti, Florence.

*Calling of Saints Peter and Andrew*, 1482, Sistine Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican State.

*Adoration of the Shepherds*, 1485, Sassetti Chapel, Santa Trinita, Florence.

*Honorius III Approves the Franciscan Rule*, 1485, Sassetti Chapel, Santa Trinita, Florence.

*Annunciation to Zachariah*, 1485–1490, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

*The Visitation*, 1485–1490, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

*Giovanna Tornabuoni* (posthumous portrait), c. 1488–1490, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

*Birth of the Virgin*, 1485–1490, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

Hugo van der Goes:

*Adoration of the Shepherds (Portinari Altarpiece)*, 1475, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

Benozzo Gozzoli:

*Procession of the Magi* and detail of Emperor John Paleologus VII, 1459–1461, Frescoes for the Medici Chapel, Medici Palace, Florence.

### **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapter 11.

Hartt, chapters 12–13.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Ahl, Diane. *Benozzo Gozzoli*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.

Cadogan, Jean K. *Domenico Ghirlandaio*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. How did portraiture and religious narrative combine in paintings by Benozzo Gozzoli and Domenico Ghirlandaio?
2. What great Flemish painting was brought to Florence in the 1470s, and how did it influence Florentine art?

## Lecture Thirteen

### The Heroic Nude

**Scope:** With the rediscovery of ancient art came a fascination with the expressive potential of the nude human body, male and female. The female nude was less common in Quattrocento Florentine Renaissance art, usually reserved for allegorical and mythological figures or for Eve in Christian narratives. The male nude was increasingly used for heroic figures (also often mythological) in action, the nudity justified by the example of ancient sculpture. This lecture considers two artists who concentrated on the male nude. Antonio del Pollaiuolo (1433–1498) was among the first to make a specialty of the male nude, in painting, sculpture, and engravings, and his figures are invariably violently dramatic. His contemporary Luca Signorelli (c. 1441–1523), who was probably a pupil of Piero della Francesca, sometimes utilized the male nude in more static, contemplative poses reminiscent of his teacher, but in his end-of-the-century masterpiece, the frescoes in the San Brizio Chapel of the Cathedral at Orvieto, he invented an amazing scene of the *Resurrection of the Dead* and another of the *Damned Consigned to Hell* filled with astonishingly physical nudes. It may be that the relative isolation of Orvieto and its distance from Florence emboldened Signorelli, for nothing really like these had yet been seen.

### Outline

- I. The Italian Renaissance is associated in many minds with the reintroduction of the nude figure into art. In fact, however, the appearance of the nude in Quattrocento painting and sculpture was gradual. Church authorities were always wary of nudity, with the qualified exceptions of Adam and Eve, and secular patrons varied widely in their attitudes. Nonetheless, the increasing rediscovery of ancient art, where nudity was common, seemed justification to an increasing number of artists and their patrons. Two artists who produced many of the most striking nudes were Antonio del Pollaiuolo and Luca Signorelli, both specialists in the male nude figure, both pagan and Christian.



- II.** Pollaiuolo was expert in several media, including painting, sculpture, and engraving.
- A.** He was a gifted portraitist, as his *Portrait of a Young Woman* (c. 1470) attests. Like most Florentine portraits of that date, it was painted in pure profile, emphasizing beauty of linear contour.
- B.** His mythological paintings, usually small, are significant.
1. *Apollo and Daphne* shows the god as he finally has the beautiful mortal in his grasp, only to find her turning into a laurel tree, thus preserving her virginity.
  2. *Hercules and the Hydra* is a tiny explosion of pictorial energy. The hero is heraldic in his pose, and the painting must have had an allegorical significance for the Medici and for Florence, which is seen in the distance on the banks of the serpentine Arno. This is a small replica of one of a series of large paintings executed for the Medici Palace (c. 1460) that is now lost.
- C.** Small bronzes were greatly prized by Renaissance collectors. Pollaiuolo's *Hercules and Antaeus* is a superbly expressive sculpture of a subject that he also painted. In one of his heroic acts (the labors), Hercules had to hold Antaeus above the earth, from which he gained his strength, while he squeezed the life from him.
- D.** Pollaiuolo's engraving (two feet wide) of a *Battle of Ten Naked Men* is a landmark of early printmaking and a tour de force among Renaissance renderings of the male nude.
- E.** Probably assisted by his brother Piero, Antonio painted a panel nearly 10 feet high of *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* (1475) for the Oratory of Saint Sebastian in Florence, which possessed a valued relic, an arm bone of the saint.
1. It is considered a striking Renaissance example of figure painting, although here, only Sebastian and one of the archers are (mostly) nude. The composition introduces a fascinating mirror symmetry: The four foreground figures consist of two pairs, each showing the same man seen from the front and behind.
  2. A fanciful Roman triumphal arch at the left and an extraordinarily extensive landscape of the Arno valley demonstrate that Pollaiuolo's interests went well beyond the study of the nude.

- III. Luca Signorelli is principally known for one surviving masterpiece, a frescoed chapel in the Cathedral of Orvieto, north of Rome.
- A. The San Brixio Chapel in the famous Gothic cathedral was painted between 1499 and 1504. A fresco cycle of the *Last Judgment* was begun there by Fra Angelico, who abandoned it when the pope called him to Rome. Fifty years later, Signorelli completed the huge paintings.
  - B. Two of the frescoes are astounding in their reliance on muscular nude figures, male and female, contrasted with the occasional skeleton, to express the events of the end of the world.
    - 1. *The Damned Consigned to Hell*, sometimes called *The Inferno*, with specific reference to Dante's epic, are appropriately depicted in a gigantic crush of figures, with as little organizational clarity as one would expect in hell.
    - 2. *The Resurrection of the Dead* restores order even as it restores the dead and is as startling today as it must have been in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century for the conceit of figures pulling themselves laboriously (but inevitably successfully, given their physiques) from the ground. Perhaps never has the Resurrection seemed as much of a self-help clinic as it does here.

### Works Discussed:

Antonio del Pollaiuolo:

*Portrait of a Young Woman*, c. 1470, Museo Poldi-Pezzoli, Milan.

*Apollo and Daphne*, probably 1470s, National Gallery, London.

*Hercules and the Hydra*, c. 1460, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*Hercules and Antaeus*, c. 1470, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

*Battle of Ten Naked Men (Battle of the Nudes)*, 1465, Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle Stampe, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

Antonio and Piero del Pollaiuolo:

*The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*, 1475, National Gallery, London.

Luca Signorelli:

*Preaching of the Antichrist*, 1499–1504, San Brixio Chapel, Duomo, Orvieto.

*The Damned Consigned to Hell (The Inferno)*, 1499–1504, San Brixio Chapel, Duomo, Orvieto.

*Dante*, 1499–1504, San Brixio Chapel, Duomo, Orvieto.

*Resurrection of the Dead*, 1499–1504, San Brixio Chapel, Duomo, Orvieto.

### **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapter 11.

Hartt, chapters 13, 16.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Kanter, Laurence B., and Tom Henry. *Luca Signorelli: The Complete Paintings*. London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 2002.

Paolucci, Antonio. *Luca Signorelli*. New York: Scala/Riverside, 1990.

Riess, Jonathan B. *Luca Signorelli: The San Brixio Chapel, Orvieto*. New York: George Braziller, 1995.

———. *The Renaissance Anti-Christ: Luca Signorelli's Orvieto Frescoes*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. Why did paintings and sculptures of the nude human figure become more common during the Renaissance?
2. Which subjects or themes were best suited to the inclusion of nude figures?

## Lecture Fourteen

### Sculpture Small and Large

**Scope:** Sculpture throughout the Quattrocento took many forms, ranging from architectural embellishment to portraiture, from large public monuments to small bronze statuettes for the private collector. This lecture looks briefly at four important sculptors and some of their contrasting contributions to Renaissance art. Antonio Pisanello (c. 1395–1455/6) was a painter as well as a sculptor, but his painting remained strongly connected to a late-medieval courtly tradition. His contribution to sculpture, on the other hand, lay in the reinvention of the ancient Roman coin in the form of the medal. The medal had no monetary value, but like the Roman coin, it had a portrait on one side and a related design on the reverse. Roman coins typically bore the portraits of emperors; in Pisanello's work, they bore images of a wider range of Renaissance persons, attesting to the new sense of individuality. Francesco di Giorgio Martini (1439–1501/2), a Siennese sculptor, architect, and painter, modeled saints and other figures with a spontaneous, rough surface that creates a visual and emotional charge. The importance of each city-state, whether under republican or despotic rule, led to great emphasis on public monuments. Nowhere was this more true than in Florence, where many monumental sculptures were erected in and near civic and religious buildings. Elaborate tombs were of great importance. Paid for by families, they were seen by all classes of society. One such tomb, in San Miniato al Monte in Florence, was designed by Antonio Rossellino (1427–1479) for the very young cardinal of Portugal. Andrea del Verrocchio (c. 1435–1488) produced sculpture of various types, materials, and sizes, but one of his most prominent and outstanding was the group of Christ and Saint Thomas for the guildhall of Orsanmichele.

### Outline

- I. The Pollaiuolo *Hercules and Antaeus* that we saw in the last lecture was a good introduction to small Renaissance bronze sculptures that have always remained the connoisseur's delight. This lecture will examine both small and large sculpture by four of the Renaissance

masters of the medium: Pisanello, Francesco di Giorgio Martini, Antonio Rossellino, and Verrocchio.

- II. Pisanello was a painter of great skill and importance, but in this course, we are looking only at his remarkable medals, a specialized field within small sculpture that may seem more like numismatics to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century viewer but was of the greatest interest to the Renaissance artist and collector.
  - A. Medals echoed ancient Roman coins, which featured portraits and attributes of Roman emperors, and the Renaissance medal was a conscious attempt to emulate the Roman achievement. Unlike the coin, of course, the medal had no monetary value.
  - B. One of Pisanello's famous medals features a profile portrait of Cecilia Gonzaga, daughter of Gianfrancesco I Gonzaga, the marquis of Mantua. The medal was struck in 1447, after Cecilia had taken the veil following the death of her father. It is Pisanello's only female portrait.
  - C. The reverse is an exquisite, poetic image that refers to the chastity of the sitter in symbols perhaps unfamiliar to modern eyes. A partially nude maiden accompanied by a unicorn sits in a moonlit, rocky landscape. The mountainous landscape is a symbol of the difficult path of virtue; the moon is a symbol of Diana, the classical virgin goddess of the hunt; and the unicorn is a symbolic reference to virginity and, by extension, to the Virgin Mary. A rectangular pillar bears the date.
- III. Like Pisanello, Francesco di Giorgio Martini was a multitasking artist: painter, sculptor, and architect. He is considered the finest Sienese artist of the late Quattrocento.
  - A. His bronzes have a rough surface, which causes light to flicker over the surface. The effect is one of nervous agitation that animates his subjects.
  - B. *Saint Jerome* (c. 1471–1485), a large plaque, is a fine example of this emotional expressiveness. The penitent saint kneels in a rocky wilderness in adoration of a crucifix hanging from a leafless tree. He appears to be speaking or praying aloud. There are affinities with the late work of Donatello and with that of Verrocchio, Martini's contemporary.

- IV. Antonio Rossellino was mostly occupied with larger sculptural forms, some of them architectural in size and function.
- A. One of the most ambitious sculptural types was tomb sculpture, not simply the decoration of a tomb but the design and construction of the entire tomb. Sometimes sculptors and architects collaborated; sometimes the sculptor was solely responsible for the work.
  - B. The Tomb of the Cardinal of Portugal (1460–1466) is an especially elaborate example of a tomb complex. It was made for a prelate who died at 25 and whose wealthy and distinguished family commissioned the work for San Miniato al Monte in Florence. The Romanesque church is on a picturesque hillside on the south side of the Arno overlooking Florence.
    - 1. The tomb is set in a deep arched niche decorated with large rosettes. Marble curtains have been drawn back to reveal the tomb, as if it were on a stage.
    - 2. A base decorated with a skull, swag, and angels supports a sarcophagus, upon which two *putti* sit. They, in turn, support a bier with the effigy of the cardinal. Two larger angels kneel on a mantle-like shelf behind and above the effigy, and two flying angels hold a wreath surrounding a relief of the Madonna and Child.
    - 3. The tomb niche was just one part of a large chapel ordered in the cardinal's will, which was probably designed by Antonio Manetti, an architect who died a short time later. Antonio Rossellino must have been largely responsible for the tomb niche, even if its general outline had been fixed. He had assistants in the realization of such a large work, but in the main—and especially in the sensitive effigy—it is his masterpiece.
- V. The most important among this group of sculptors was Andrea del Verrocchio who, quite aside from being the master of Leonardo da Vinci, was a wonderfully gifted sculptor (and occasional painter) whose work has received renewed admiration in recent years.
- A. His *David* (c. 1465–1470), recently restored, was probably commissioned by Piero di Cosimo de' Medici. In 1476, it was sold by his son, Lorenzo, to the city of Florence and installed inside the Palazzo della Signoria. At this time, it was altered by the artist so

that it could fit on a small column in a niche. The change involved moving the head of Goliath from a position to David's right to one between his feet.

- B. For a niche on the façade of Orsanmichele, Verrocchio designed the *Christ and Saint Thomas* (1465–1483). The niche had originally held a single figure, and the artist was successful in accommodating two interactive figures to the small space while interpreting the visceral subject with tact and dignity.
- C. At the end of his life, Verrocchio was preoccupied with a project that put him in competition with the legacy of Donatello: a bronze equestrian monument to a *condottiere*, Bartolommeo Colleoni. Begun about 1481, the casting was only accomplished 15 years later, well after the artist's death. Although the general had requested that the monument (he left money for it) be erected in Piazza San Marco, the city fathers decided that the less prominent square beside Ss. Giovanni e Paolo was more appropriate. The forceful statue is perfectly situated with the massive Gothic church as a backdrop.

### **Works Discussed:**

Francesco di Giorgio Martini:

*Saint Jerome*, c. 1477, Samuel H. Kress Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Antonio Pisanello:

Portrait medal of Cecilia Gonzaga (obverse); maiden with a unicorn (reverse), 1447, Galleria Giorgio Franchetti, Ca' d'Oro, Venice.

Antonio Rossellino:

Tomb of the Cardinal of Portugal, 1460–1466, San Miniato al Monte, Florence.

Andrea del Verrocchio:

*David*, c. 1465–1470, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

*Christ and Saint Thomas*, 1465–1483, Orsanmichele, Florence.

*Equestrian Monument of Bartolommeo Colleoni*, c. 1481–1496, Campo SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Venice.

**Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapters 7, 10, 12.

Hartt, chapters 10, 12–14.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Butterfield, Andrew. *The Sculptures of Andrea del Verrocchio*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. *Catalogue raisonné*.

Olson, Roberta J. M. *Italian Renaissance Sculpture*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992.

Pope-Hennessy, John. *Introduction to Italian Sculpture*. Part I: *Italian Renaissance Sculpture*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. London: Phaidon Press, 2000.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What are the types of sculpture popular in the Renaissance?
2. How does Verrocchio's equestrian monument of *Colleoni* differ from Donatello's *Gattamelata* (Lecture Nine)?



## Lecture Fifteen

### Botticelli—Spirituality and Sensuality

**Scope:** Sandro Botticelli (1445–1510), the subject of the next two lectures, has for more than a century been one of the most popular artists of the Quattrocento. Yet he died poor and out of fashion, and his modern fame surpasses that of his own day. He was an assistant to Fra Filippo Lippi, from whom may derive his melodic draftsmanship and lyrical color that speak directly to the senses, yet he is a complex artist, puzzling because the meaning of his work is sometimes abstruse, philosophical, and intellectual. The first lecture will include one of his famous paintings of the Madonna, a type much admired and much imitated, then a small dramatic subject, a larger church altarpiece, and a fresco. Particular attention will be devoted to his two most well known creations, the *Birth of Venus* and *Primavera* (“*Spring*”), especially the latter, whose meaning is one of the most discussed topics in Renaissance art.

### Outline

- I. Sandro Botticelli’s art is linked inextricably to the culture—and cultural wars—of the last quarter of the Quattrocento. He is equally a part of the humanist culture that rejoiced in the revival of intellectual speculation and the subjects and forms of antiquity, and the religious culture that was about to be violently shaken by reactionary, politically volatile attitudes. The two lectures devoted to Botticelli will trace this evolution. The chronology of much of his work is uncertain, and the dates given here should not be taken as firm assertions.
- II. His paintings of the Madonna are famous. But they were much imitated and forged, and in that debased currency are so well known that to see a great example can be a revelation.
  - A. Such is the *Madonna of the Eucharist* (c. 1470–1474) in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. The beauty of the Madonna, Child, and angel (wingless but indisputably angelic) is exquisitely balanced between the sensuous and the spiritual, and the composition is more complex in its harmony than any of Botticelli’s imitators could grasp.

- B. The Eucharist of the title—the wine and bread representing the blood and body of Christ—is represented by the plate of grapes from which 12 ears, or spikes, of wheat project in a tiara-like form. The wheat may also suggest the crown of thorns, an additional reference to the Passion.
- III. Around the same time, Botticelli painted a tiny panel representing the *Discovery of Holofernes* (c. 1472–1473). In this Old Testament story, the heroine, Judith, brings salvation to her people by decapitating the enemy general and carrying his head off as proof of the deed. The story offered three scenes popular in painting: the decapitation, the discovery, and Judith returning with the head. (A painting of the *Return of Judith* with the head is the pendant to this one.) Showing the aftermath may be the least common in painting. The prominence of the bloody neck underlines the symbolic parallel Christian theologians drew between the subject and the New Testament sacrifice of Jesus.
- IV. Botticelli was an accomplished fresco painter. His *Saint Augustine* (1480) was painted on a pillar in the choir of the Church of the Ognissanti in Florence. Later, it was detached and repositioned in the nave. Botticelli vividly imagines this great father of the Roman Church in his study among his books and in a state of concentration that is equal parts intellectual absorption and spiritual inspiration.
- V. A secondary branch of the Medici family commissioned two of Botticelli's most famous paintings. The earlier was the *Primavera* ("Spring") of c. 1478–1482, a 10-foot-wide painting of dreamlike, lyrical beauty whose mythological-allegorical meanings have been endlessly probed.
- A. Venus, fully clothed and similar to Botticelli's Madonnas, stands at the center, a mistress of ceremonies. Behind her is a grove; to her left are the Three Graces and Mercury.
  - B. At the right stands Flora, the goddess of spring, seemingly unaware of the nymph (fleeing the wind god, Zephyr), who appears about to collide with her but is actually metamorphosing into her.
- VI. *The Birth of Venus* (c. 1485), another large painting, was done for the same patron—Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici—and may have hung in the same room with the *Primavera*.

- A. This iconic painting derives its subject from ancient literature and is the first Renaissance treatment of the theme.
- B. With no extant image of the subject to guide him, Botticelli uses the Roman Venus in the Medici collection for the principal figure and ingeniously borrowed the composition from the usual composition for the baptism of Christ.

**VII. *Venus and Mars*** (c. 1475–1478, or 1480s?) is a remarkably sultry painting for the period. It has been surmised that it was commissioned by the Vespucci family (*vespe* means “wasps” in Italian, and they are found in the painting) and alludes to the famous platonic romance between Simonetta Vespucci and Giuliano de’ Medici that was ended by her death in 1476 (he was murdered two years later).

- A. That assumption would lead to the earlier of the proposed datings of the painting given above.
- B. On the other hand, it was probably painted as a bedroom decoration, perhaps on a chest, on the bed, or on the wainscoting. The wide, low format was dictated by the use. Such a specific location would argue for a consummated union of an unidentified couple, and the painting has often been assigned a later date.
- C. The subject is both sexual and neo-Platonic in nature—the latter in that violent action (Mars and his lance) has been vanquished by our nobler nature (Venus as “Humanitas”). Neo-Platonism was popular among the educated elite and many of the artists they patronized. The Florentine philosopher Marsilio Ficino invoked astrology: Mars is “outstanding among the planets because he makes men stronger, but Venus masters him.” Or, we might say, make love, not war.

## **Works Discussed:**

Sandro Botticelli:

*Madonna of the Eucharist*, c. 1470–1474, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

*The Discovery of Holofernes*, c. 1472–1473, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*The Adoration of the Magi*, c. 1475, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*Saint Augustine*, 1480, Ognissanti, Florence.

*Primavera*, c. 1478–1482, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*The Birth of Venus*, c. 1485, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*Venus and Mars*, c. 1480s, National Gallery, London.

### **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapter 11.

Hartt, chapter 13.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Deimling, Barbara. *Sandro Botticelli*. New York: Taschen America, 2000.

Lightbrown, Ronald. *Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Abbeville Press, 1989.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. What allegorical or symbolic allusions does Botticelli seem to have imbedded in his *Primavera*?
2. Why did such allusions and references appeal to his patrons?

## Lecture Sixteen

### Botticelli and the Trouble in Italy

**Scope:** Called to Rome in 1481 to participate in the epochal decoration of the Sistine Chapel, Botticelli created three of the large frescoes. We will look at the *Punishment of the Rebels against Aaron*, which in addition to its narrative drama, introduces the arch of Constantine as a central element, not simply as an archeological element but as an early example of borrowing from the pagan past to stress the Christian present. A similar “conversion” of pagan antiquity is found in a new version of the *Adoration of the Magi*, which also attests to the influence of Leonardo. *The Annunciation* (c. 1490), a quintessential Christian subject painted often by Botticelli, is here interpreted with an almost neurotic edge. Around 1490, he painted a monumental altarpiece for the high altar of Saint Barnabas, which like *The Annunciation*, displays a fervent emotional quality that marked the late work of the master. His extraordinary *Calumny of Apelles* plays that emotion against a rigorously classical architectural setting to vividly reinvent an ancient Greek painting, known only through written description, in an artistic tour de force. Swept up in the mystical, reformist, extremist preaching of Savonarola, Botticelli destroyed many of his “pagan” paintings of nudes and intensified the anguish in his religious art, of which *The Lamentation* is a wrenching example. After Savonarola was burned at the stake in 1498, Botticelli’s art lapsed into relative quietude; he painted metaphysical musings on the “last things;” and his *Mystic Nativity* may be his haunting, poetic summation.

### Outline

- I. Botticelli was among those called to Rome to execute frescoes in the very important decoration of the new Sistine Chapel. In fact, according to Vasari, he was placed in charge of the project, and three of the works are his. It should not be supposed that he selected the subjects, which form an elaborate program and must have been worked out by the pope’s theologians, but Botticelli may have coordinated the working procedures.

- A. His *Punishment of the Rebels against Aaron* (1482) combines three episodes arrayed across the foreground rather like a triptych. Thus, Moses appears three times in the single unified setting of architecture and landscape.
  - B. The most striking feature of the fresco is certainly the carefully represented arch of Constantine, which is not only the principal compositional anchor but also invokes both imperial Rome and, specifically, the papal authority derived from Constantine's building of Saint Peter's Basilica. This, like almost every significant work of art in both the Basilica and the Sistine Chapel from the 15<sup>th</sup> through the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, is fundamentally about the spiritual and temporal authority of the Church.
- II. *The Adoration of the Magi*, although undated, bears witness to Botticelli's knowledge of Leonardo da Vinci's unfinished painting of the same subject (Lecture Eighteen) of about 1481–1482, which exerted a strong influence on Florentine artists.
- A. Leonardo's influence is most apparent in the figures of the Magi as they hesitantly approach the Holy Family.
  - B. As in the Sistine fresco just discussed, Botticelli invokes the authority of antiquity, though in a different way.
    - 1. Here, the Nativity takes place under a wooden roof built within a Roman ruin—that is, the old order of the pagan world is superseded by the new Christian order.
    - 2. The forms of the wooden roof also suggest both the Trinity and the Crucifixion.
- III. Botticelli, like most Italian artists, had many opportunities to paint the Annunciation, but found in the subject psychological potential that gives his versions a special urgency. In this one (c. 1489–1490, Uffizi), the Virgin shrinks gracefully but almost fearfully from the angel, and the perspective cross-pull of the tiled pavement increases the tension.
- IV. The *Saint Barnabas Altarpiece* (c. 1490) is a large, richly colored, and superbly organized composition. The titular saint (standing immediately to the left of the Madonna) is only occasionally painted and then usually in the company of Saint Paul, with whom he preached at Cyprus and Lystra in Asia Minor. The most expressive figure is John the Baptist, immediately to the right of the throne, whose barely contained emotion keys the painting.

- V. A famous painting, and one of the most unusual subjects in Renaissance art, is the *Calumny of Apelles* (1490s). The subject was taken from a description of a painting by the ancient Greek painter Apelles, given by the Greek writer Lucien and retold by Alberti in his *Della Pittura*. Alberti specifically recommended this story as one that artists of his day would do well to paint. Such learned subjects, he said, would give great pleasure.
- A. In brief, the allegory shows an innocent victim dragged before an unjust judge, while an old woman in black (Penitence) and the literally naked Truth call on heaven to witness the deceitful act.
  - B. The work was not painted on commission, and Botticelli gave it to a friend. The subject is painted with such emotional intensity that it is impossible to believe that it was merely to show the result of following Alberti's advice. It may be that it was daring defense of the Dominican preacher Savonarola, who had been excommunicated in 1497 and executed in 1498.
- VI. Savonarola was the most extraordinary religious, and political, figure to emerge at the end of the Quattrocento in Florence. His radical, penitential preaching in the cathedral was perceived as a threat to the civil order. His puritanical denunciation of classical humanism led Botticelli to sacrifice paintings of nudes to the bonfires of the vanities inspired by Savonarola. Botticelli's harrowing, emotionally strung-out style in the 1490s seems a direct reflection of the Dominican friar's imprecations.
- A. The heart-rending *Lamentation* (c. 1495–1500) is an example of this late style. In front of a rock-cut tomb, the broken arch of the body of Christ, supported by his swooning mother, is presented in the immediate foreground with (among other saints) the Magdalen, Saint John the Evangelist, and the penitent Saint Jerome. This frieze of anguish causes an indelible pain.
  - B. The so-called *Mystical Nativity* (1500), with its semi-millennial prophetic summoning of an apocalyptic time, might be called a neo-medieval vision. Botticelli's inscription declares, in part, that it was painted "during the trouble in Italy... when the Devil was loosed upon the earth... Afterward he shall be put in chains..., and we shall see him trodden underfoot as in this picture."

## **Works Discussed:**

Artist unknown:

*The Martyrdom of Savonarola*, Museo di San Marco, Florence.

Sandro Botticelli:

*Punishment of the Rebels against Aaron*, 1482, Sistine Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican State.

*The Adoration of the Magi*, c. 1482, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

*The Annunciation*, c. 1490, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*Madonna and Child with Saints (Saint Barnabas Altarpiece)*, c. 1490, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*Calumny of Apelles*, 1490s, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*The Lamentation*, c. 1495–1500, Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

*The Mystic Nativity*, 1500, National Gallery, London.

## **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapter 11.

Hartt, chapter 13.

## **Supplementary Reading:**

Deimling, Barbara. *Sandro Botticelli*. New York: Taschen America, 2000.

Lightbrown, Ronald. *Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Abbeville Press, 1989.

## **Questions to Consider:**

1. What accounts for the pronounced shift in Botticelli's style and content in the 1490s?
2. What was the source of the story depicted in Botticelli's *Calumny*?



## Lecture Seventeen

### Filippino Lippi

**Scope:** The son of Fra Filippo Lippi and the nun Lucrezia, Filippino (1457/8–1504) trained first with his father, then worked in Botticelli's shop. About 1484, the Brancacci family asked him to complete the famous fresco cycle that Filippino's father had watched Masaccio paint 60 years before. Political circumstances had prevented the lower registers of the lateral walls from being completed. Filippino successfully accommodated his style to his great predecessor's, but his characteristic softness and melancholy are usually apparent. His *Portrait of a Youth* shows how much he learned from Masaccio's example of human dignity. From his father, he borrowed the poetic conception of the *Adoration of the Child*, in which the Madonna kneels in humility, gazing down at the Christ Child. His altarpieces are bold and imaginative in composition and expression. *The Vision of Saint Bernard* combines suave, elongated forms; an expressive landscape; and a charming sense of awe to powerful effect. The large *Adoration of the Magi* skillfully stages many figures in an elaborate composition, painted in brilliant, distinctive colors. In *Exorcism of the Demon in the Temple of Mars*, one of the frescoes in the Strozzi Chapel in Santa Maria Novella, finished near the end of his life, Filippino introduced a sharply altered expressionism, almost manic in its psychology, to depict an apocryphal legend of Saint Philip. Figures and space are manipulated in the process, with perspective being used for expressive rather than rational purposes. In this evolution, Filippino had company in the contemporary work of Leonardo da Vinci, the subject of our next two lectures.

### Outline

- I. When Filippino Lippi was asked in 1484 to complete the fresco cycle in the Brancacci Chapel left unfinished by Masaccio nearly 60 years earlier, it may have tapped into his earliest memory of seeing the frescoes under his father's guidance. The elder Lippi had watched Masaccio at work, and while Filippino had ample opportunity to study

the frescoes on his own, his remarkably close adherence to Masaccio's model suggests a special devotion.

- A. He painted the lower registers of the lateral walls. That on the right side (facing the altar) shows the *Dispute with Simon Magus* and the *Crucifixion of Saint Peter*; the *Liberation of Saint Peter* is on the projecting wall of the entrance arch.
  - B. The *Dispute with Simon Magus* is told in Voragine's *Golden Legend*. Simon Magus was a magician who pretended to supernatural powers and vied with Saint Peter for attention in Rome. Unable to raise the dead, he tried to bribe Peter to tell him his secret (hence, *simony*). Here, before the Emperor Nero, Peter confronts Simon and, apparently, exposes him as a fraud given that a small pagan idol has fallen. Nero nonetheless condemns Peter.
  - C. On the left-hand side of the fresco, Peter is crucified. At his own request, so that he not emulate Christ, he is crucified upside down. Filippino included portrait heads in his frescoes in the chapel, and here, in front of the open archway, the figure looking out has been identified by some as Botticelli.
  - D. On the narrow wall surface at the entrance, the artist painted the quiet scene of the *Liberation of Saint Peter*. The saint is led from prison by the gentlest imaginable angel, while the youthful guard sleeps at his post. Although, as noted, Filippino carefully accommodated his style to Masaccio's in the chapel, this painting is fully characteristic of the younger artist's delicate manner.
- II. *The Portrait of a Youth* (c. 1485) has, in addition to delicacy, a quiet dignity expressed in simple forms and colors. The nearly frontal figure, framed by an open window against a blue sky, seems the very essence of Renaissance humanism.
- III. From his father, Filippino derived his type of the *Adoration of the Child* (1477–1480, Uffizi). He invests his Madonna with greater scale and grandeur, without sacrificing the solemn poetry.
- IV. *The Vision of Saint Bernard* (c. 1485–1490) is a notably original composition in its fanciful landscape setting. Bernard of Clairvaux, the famous Cistercian theologian and reformer, held a particular devotion for the Virgin. Legend reports that when Bernard was so utterly exhausted that he could scarcely continue his writing, the Virgin appeared to him to lend him strength. Filippino vividly imagines this

scene as taking place in front of a rocky outcropping near the monastery so that Bernard has a private place to write and, as it happened, to receive the visit from Mary.

- A. It has been observed that the open book between them, whose pages we can read, displays the account of the Annunciation from the Gospel of Luke and that the composition echoes that of an Annunciation. The significance might be that Christ is reborn in Bernard's heart.
  - B. The angels accompanying the Virgin are among Filippino's most enchanting creations, and the wealthy donor who commissioned the painting is seen clearly, yet modestly, in the lower right corner.
- V. An even larger altarpiece, more than 8 feet square, is the animated and fascinating *Adoration of the Magi* (1496). Commissioned for the monastery of San Donato a Scopeto, then just outside the walls of Florence, the painting was to substitute for the long-unfinished painting of the same subject by Leonardo da Vinci that we will discuss in the next lecture.
- A. Not surprisingly, Filippino's much larger painting was influenced by Leonardo's epochal composition (which the monks still owned), specifically, in the encircling of the Holy Family by the many figures attending them.
  - B. Also influential on this painting was the imported masterpiece by Hugo van der Goes, *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (see Lecture Twelve), whose landscape details were closely observed by Filippino.
- VI. Filippino's late work often takes a turn not merely for the fanciful but toward the bizarre. That is surely the case in the frescoes for the Strozzi Chapel in Santa Maria Novella (1487–1502).
- A. The remarkable *Exorcism of the Demon in the Temple of Mars* depicts an apocryphal account of Saint Philip in Asia Minor. In the Temple of Mars at Hierapolis, in the base of the god's altar, dwelt a dragon-like demon. Philip exorcised the demon, and the poisonous fumes that were released caused the king's son, one of the pagan worshippers, to fall dead. This infuriated the Roman priests, who subsequently crucified Philip.
  - B. The exceptionally ornate architecture of the altar of Mars seems almost Baroque. The details of the architectural frame around the

fresco are taken directly from the Golden House of Nero in Rome, some of which had just been excavated and was seen by Filippino on the trip to Rome that delayed his work on the fresco until the turn of the century.

- C. The great refinement of the painting technique collides with the hyperbole of the costumed figures and their sculptural counterparts on the altar. There is a neurotic quality that should probably be linked to the psychology of Savonarolan Florence, just as is Botticelli's late work.

### **Works Discussed:**

Filippino Lippi:

*The Dispute with Simon Magus* and *The Crucifixion of Saint Peter*, c. 1484, Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence.

*The Liberation of Saint Peter*, c. 1484, Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence.

*Portrait of a Youth*, c. 1485, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

*Adoration of the Child*, 1477–1480, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*The Vision of Saint Bernard*, c. 1485, Church of the Badia, Florence.

*Adoration of the Magi*, 1496, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*Exorcism of the Demon in the Temple of Mars*, 1487–1502, Strozzi Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

### **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapter 11.

Hartt, chapter 13.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. Who was Simon Magus?
2. Contrast the style and expression of two of Filippino Lippi's paintings: the altarpiece of the *Vision of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux* and the fresco of the *Exorcism of the Demon in the Temple of Mars*.

## Lecture Eighteen

### Leonardo da Vinci—Portraits and Altarpieces

**Scope:** Universal genius is daunting, and Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) is probably the most famous universal genius in modern history. We will content ourselves with two lectures about “just” his painting, leaving aside any examination of his work in sculpture and architecture, not to mention his speculations and explorations in geology, anatomy, engineering, optics, military science, flight, and so on. Even a genius has to have a beginning. In the case of Leonardo da Vinci, his artistic beginning was in the workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio, whose sculpture we have seen already. Verrocchio was also a painter, although his figures are often modeled severely as though he were still thinking as a sculptor. As usual in workshop practice, the more gifted studio assistants sometimes had a hand in paintings by the master. In the *Baptism of Christ*, Leonardo painted the kneeling angel at the far left and part of the river valley behind him. This was recorded by Vasari in his *Lives of the Artists* and is manifestly true. The style in those passages is in sharp contrast to Verrocchio’s but in complete accord with Leonardo’s already mature style. To a remarkable extent, Leonardo’s artistic language was fully formed by this time (he was about 18), and his portrait of *Ginevra de’ Benci* (c. 1474) is further evidence. It is typical of Leonardo’s early fame that an unfinished altarpiece, *Adoration of the Magi*, really just a monochrome underdrawing, had a strong influence on some of his contemporaries.

Leonardo spent many years in Milan, where his famous and haunting *Madonna of the Rocks* (there are two versions) was painted as part of an altarpiece for the Church of San Francesco Grande. The profound mystery of the dark grotto and the solemn group placed before it have prompted many subjective interpretations, although not as many as has *Mona Lisa*. The latter (surely not his most beautiful female portrait—see the exquisite *Lady with an Ermine*) has acquired a mystique unequaled by any other painting. We can only try to look at the painting with unclouded eyes.

## Outline

- I. First there is the matter of his name and its proper usage in English. Despite widespread misuse in popular writing (and even in the newspaper of record), it is incorrect to refer to “da Vinci.” That simply means “from Vinci,” the town in which he was born, but so were other people, including members of his family, any of which could be meant by “da Vinci.” The correct form is either Leonardo da Vinci or Leonardo. Any examination of the art historical literature, from the Renaissance to the present, whether in Italian or English, will make apparent the correct usage. This is not, by the way, a rule that may be automatically applied to all other Italian artists. Exceptions will be found, and there will be a variety of reasons for them, but there is no exception in the case of Leonardo. In general, names of people should be given in the form they use themselves or that used by their contemporaries, not casually altered by later generations.
- II. When he was 16 or 17, Leonardo entered the studio of Verrocchio, a well-established artist with major commissions in hand (see Lecture Fourteen). Verrocchio was principally a sculptor but undertook painting as well.
  - A. The *Baptism of Christ* (c. 1470) is the most well known example of his painting, principally because of the collaboration of the young Leonardo. Made for a monastery outside Florence, the *Baptism* is obviously related to Verrocchio’s sculpture of *Christ and Saint Thomas* (Lecture Fourteen). The principal figures in the *Baptism* are modeled very much in the manner of sculpture, with a resultant harshness in the shadows and angularity of contour.
  - B. The two kneeling angels have long provided the exact contrast between the master and his apprentice: The head of that on the right, by Verrocchio, has a wiry descriptive linearity, while that on the left, by Leonardo, is painted with a melting softness, a subtlety of modeling that will develop into one of the miracles of art. The drapery of Leonardo’s angel is elaborate and was based on a highly finished preparatory drawing. The landscape above their heads is painted with a vaporous and visionary design and touch that will also become characteristic of the artist.
- III. “In Florence he painted the portrait of Ginevra d’Amerigo Benci from nature, a work which was so finished that it seemed not a portrait but

Ginevra herself” (*Anonimo Gaddiano*, c. 1542), In 1472, Leonardo became a member of the guild of Saint Luke and could accept commissions on his own, although he also continued to work in Verrocchio’s shop. The date of the portrait of *Ginevra de’ Benci* is generally thought to be circa 1474–1478.

- A. Two aspects of this painting were recent innovations in Italian portrait painting: The three-quarter pose replaced the profile view, and the oil medium (on panel) was used in conjunction with tempera. Both innovations were borrowed from Flemish portraits, which were already found in Florentine collections.
- B. The marble half-length of a *Woman with Flowers*, carved by Verrocchio at about the same time, is surely the same sitter. Apart from helping to confirm the date of Leonardo’s portrait, it serves to remind us that *Ginevra de’ Benci*, rather remarkably, lacks hands.
  - 1. Aside from the fact that Leonardo drew very expressive hands, it is also notable that Renaissance portraits are rarely if ever square, as this one is. The inescapable conclusion is that the painting has been cut down, removing the hands, which perhaps, had been damaged. The alteration is confirmed when we look at the reverse of the panel, where the device and motto of the sitter are clearly abbreviated by the cutting.
  - 2. A study of hands by Leonardo (Windsor, Royal Library), in a pose quite similar to that of Verrocchio’s sitter (although reversed), has been proposed as the design for Ginevra’s missing hands.
- C. What was really new was Leonardo’s own style, quite unlike anything that had preceded it, especially in the exquisite modeling of the skin tones, with a smoky gradation (*sfumato*) from light to dark that is never abrupt, never disruptive to the flow of vision.
  - 1. Leonardo controls the eye’s reading of Ginevra’s face through this modeling, and the slow progress of this reading ensures that the face—and the painting—has a serenity and a mystery that is hypnotic.
  - 2. Related to this is the strangely unemotional character of the face and the dreamy eyes that do not really connect with ours. This seems to be more a projection of Leonardo’s own secretive personality than a record of the sitter’s.

3. Most remarkably, Leonardo, in his early 20s, has already exhibited the characteristics of his mature style, already given us the essentials of the *Mona Lisa* a quarter century before that masterpiece.

IV. Leonardo expressed himself, first of all, through line. One of the greatest of all draftsmen, he was equally gifted in perspective rendering (the mathematics of design) and in imaginative improvisation (the poetry of design). An entire course could be taught on his drawings alone, but they are also the underpinnings, emotional and structural, of his paintings.

- A. A famous pen drawing of a *Landscape* (1473) brings the Arno Valley to life, with a sense of things growing, wind blowing, water flowing.
- B. His *Adoration of the Magi* (1481–1482), referred to in previous lectures for its great influence, was not merely unfinished but is essentially a drawing in monochrome paint.
  1. Perspective played its role here, particularly in the “half-built” architecture in the left background, and preliminary studies showed more complete, even dominant, ideas. But the great impact of the painting came from the foreground group of the Madonna and Child, who are utterly encompassed by haunted figures. The Magi and their retinue are not so much processing toward the holy pair as they are creeping uncertainly, even fearfully, toward them.
  2. The unprecedented sacredness of the Christ Child to those who have traveled so far to see him had never been given such a profound psychological interpretation. This central Christian mystery of the Incarnation is absolute in Leonardo’s image.
- C. In 1481, Leonardo left Florence for Milan, invited by the duke, Ludovico Sforza, where he remained for 20 years. There, he painted the *Madonna of the Rocks* (c. 1483–1486, Louvre), a painting in which a new moment in Renaissance art—the High Renaissance—may be said to emerge. The broad-based pyramidal composition that contains and unifies the complex group figures is a core design of this culminating stylistic period of the central Italian Renaissance, one that would last for fewer than 40 years.
  1. This is a fully finished work, yet here, too, it is *disegno* (“drawing and design”) that controls the painting. Not just the



grand foreground pyramid, but the unforgettable background, more nightmare than dream, is created this way. There, color is the absence of color—brown, black, and bluish-gray fantastic rock formations that seem to swallow up our straining perception. Scholars have pointed out that tradition identified the cave of the Nativity with that of the Sepulcher. As often with Leonardo, he paints this in a way that seems to resonate remarkably with the images and ideas of modern psychology.

2. It is easy to be confused by the iconography, because Leonardo's Madonna embraces the child John the Baptist, not the child Jesus. Over the latter, she extends her hand in a protective gesture of peace; the Christ Child raises a hand in benediction toward the Baptist, and the large, kneeling angel points a long finger at the Baptist while looking out of the picture toward the viewer/worshipper. The immediate foreground shows the edge of a seeming precipice, suggesting the chasm that separates us from the sacred figures and, perhaps, from salvation.

V. Portraits were an important part of the small body of Leonardo's work. As observed, he mastered the technical means at the beginning, and the psychology, too, was in place. Yet there is remarkable variety of pose and expression in his portraits.

- A. The *Lady with an Ermine* (Cecilia Gallerani) was painted in Milan about a decade after *Ginevra de' Benci*. The beautiful sitter was the mistress of the duke of Milan, Ludovico Sforza (called "Il Moro" because he was swarthy), and the ermine (*galé*) is a speaking symbol for her name. The painting is one of the liveliest of Leonardo's portraits, expressively posed and illuminated.
- B. The *Mona Lisa* (c. 1503–1506) is the most often looked at, seldom *seen*, painting in the world. If one succeeds in penetrating the crowds invariably in front of it at the Louvre, one must still penetrate the protective layers of glass, the discolored varnish of centuries, and above all, the mythic status of the painting. It is a remarkable portrait, but to see it objectively takes a long time.
  1. The "mirror of tarnished steel" would look very different if the varnish were removed. She would no longer be "the submarine goddess of the Louvre" (Walter Pater), but simply,

Lisa di Antonio Maria Gherardini, the wife of Francesco del Giocondo of Florence, and about 24 years old. *Mona* is a contraction of *ma donna*, “my lady.”

2. This portrait, made soon after Leonardo’s return to Florence, shows the lady seated on a loggia (the parapet and the bases of the columns are visible) with a fantastic landscape of rivers and rocks stretching into the distance. The landscape is related to those already imagined by Leonardo in earlier paintings and is compositionally linked to the sitter’s head and shoulders.
3. Her full figure is animated by the gentle turn from the three-quarter torso to the nearly frontal face. The modeling of the relaxed hands and face dissolves line into shadow, imbuing the features with a sense of a shifting and unfathomable expression. And unlike Ginevra de’ Benci, Mona Lisa looks directly at us, not into herself, insisting that we return her gaze. According to Vasari, Leonardo worked three years on the portrait and, in the end, kept it for himself. (It was with him when he died in France and, with other paintings, entered the French royal collection.)

### **Works Discussed:**

Leonardo da Vinci:

*Ginevra de’ Benci*, obverse and reverse, c. 1474, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

*Landscape*, 1473, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*The Adoration of the Magi*, 1481–1482, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*Madonna of the Rocks*, 1483–1486, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

*Lady with an Ermine (Cecilia Gallerani)*, c. 1485, Czartoryski Museum, Cracow.

*Mona Lisa*, 1503–1506, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Andrea del Verrocchio:

*Baptism of Christ*, c. 1470, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*Woman with Flowers*, c. 1475–1480, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

### **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapter 14.

Hartt, chapter 16.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Brown, David. *Leonardo da Vinci: Origins of a Genius*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

Marani, Pietro C. *Leonardo da Vinci: The Complete Paintings*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000.

Santi, Bruno. *Leonardo da Vinci*. New York: Scala/Riverside, 1990.

Steinberg, Leo. *Leonardo's Incessant Last Supper*. New York: Zone Books, 2001.

Temperine, Renaud. *The Little Book of Leonardo da Vinci*. Paris: Flammarion, 2002.

Zöllner, Frank. *Leonardo da Vinci*. New York: Taschen America, 2000.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What is meant by *sfumato* in painting?
2. Can you describe a principle of design that characterizes the High Renaissance style that arose during the 1480s?

## Lecture Nineteen

### Leonardo da Vinci—The Last Supper

**Scope:** In this lecture, we will discuss *The Last Supper* (1495–1498) in some detail. Three facts must be reiterated: (1) Despite the recent long and arduous restoration of the mural, it is irreversibly a ruin. (2) Because of the experimental methods used by Leonardo, his masterpiece was deteriorating rapidly during his own lifetime. (3) The painting has nonetheless always overwhelmed viewers with its physical and emotional power while inspiring countless artists. We will sketch its history, including near destruction, contrasting it with other representations of the subject to underscore the psychological brilliance of Leonardo's conception and attempt to explain its virtually physical impact. Finally, we will look at several drawings. The *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne and John the Baptist* is a full-scale charcoal *cartoon*—a drawing used in the transfer of a design to a panel for a painting. If Leonardo intended to make a painting, as seems likely, he never did so. The dense interlocking of the figures, realistically unnatural but compositionally potent; the mysterious pools of shadow; and the typically enigmatic smiles of the women produce an aura that is deeply affecting but inexplicable and, as other artists were to learn, inimitable. Leonardo's red-chalk *Self-Portrait* and a terrifying black-chalk drawing known as *Deluge*, in which the self-confident world of the Renaissance seems to self-destruct, will conclude the lecture.

### Outline

- I. Leonardo abandoned commissions, left work unfinished, and through experimental methods, sometimes caused the serious deterioration of his work. *The Last Supper* is a notorious example of this last habit.
  - A. *The Last Supper* (1495–1498) was not painted for just any refectory, but for the refectory of the monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie, whose church was the designated burial place for the Sforza dynasty of Milan. The commission came from Ludovico Sforza, duke of Milan, and the Dominicans of the monastery.

- B.** Apparently forgoing fresco because the slow pace of the medium was at odds with the spontaneity of his method, Leonardo painted directly on the wall with a mixture of tempera and oil. Moreover, the mural is on an end wall, not protected by a room on the other side, but exposed to the inevitable incursion of water and the stress of changing temperature. A door punched through the wall at a later date further damaged the painting, destroying the feet of Christ.
- C.** That its ruinous condition does not utterly obscure the effect of the painting results from the power of the *concetto*, the psychologically profound idea or concept embodied in an unprecedented composition. Had the painting relied solely on color or surface finish and detail for its effectiveness, all would have been lost long ago.

- 1.** The refectory, where the monks or nuns took their meals, was the traditional location of life-size murals of the Last Supper, an utterly appropriate subject for silent contemplation. Leonardo conceived the room in which the sacred supper took place as a modified continuation of the refectory itself, as comparison of the real and painted cornice lines demonstrates. The perspective recession constructs the space, but it also organizes the surface composition and focuses on the spiritual center of the story.
- 2.** The table spans almost the width of the wall. All of the figures are on the far side of the table, with Judas distinguished from the other apostles by his inaction and by shadow. The apostles are reacting to the announcement that one of them shall betray Jesus, and the great variety of their reactions is organized into subgroups of three figures each.
- 3.** The motionless pyramid at the center of this scene of consternation, Jesus is also the controlling figure. In large and small ways, he not only enacts the narrative of the moment but symbolizes the sacrifice and salvation that will follow from this supper, a supper that is theologically the institution of the rite of the Mass. Physically overwhelming, spiritually profound, intellectually astonishing, Leonardo's invention was one of the most influential in the history of Western art.

- II.** Drawing was at the heart of Leonardo's artistic and intellectual process. It was, more than in the usual artistic sense, a way of thinking.

Many of his drawings, often contained in his notebooks, literally reveal the creative act, showing the evolution of an idea, not merely from one drawing to the next, but within a single drawing. We will look at a *cartoon*, or full-size preparatory drawing for a painting, at a highly finished red-chalk self-portrait, and at an extraordinary fantasy in black chalk—an evocation of a (or *the*) deluge.

- A. The *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne and John the Baptist* (c. 1507–1508, National Gallery, London) was surely a cartoon for a painting that was never executed, because the design was never pricked or incised for transfer to a panel. Nothing is known of the presumed commission, but the subject—or rather the treatment of the subject—is one that preoccupied Leonardo. A related painting, probably begun before this drawing, is now in the Louvre.
1. The London drawing is an extraordinarily intricate composition in which the Virgin half-sits on her mother's knee while holding the Christ Child across Anne's lap so that he may bless the infant Baptist. The “Mona Lisa smiles” of Anne and Mary, as though sharing a deep secret, enhance the theme of generation, of the lineage of Jesus.
  2. Eight sheets of paper were glued together to make the nearly 6-foot-high surface ready for the charcoal. The charcoal is often smudged and blurred at the junctures of the figures, resulting both in mysterious shadows and an appropriate unity of forms. The rare survival of the large drawing is due both to the fact that it was never damaged by transfer for the presumed painting and to the contemporary fame of Leonardo's work. A cartoon for the Louvre painting, for example, was famously exhibited to the Florentine public, who visited it “as if they were going to a solemn festival.”
- B. The red-chalk drawing in Turin's Royal Library is widely accepted as a *Self-Portrait* (c. 1512). Ironically, the best support for the identification is probably the strong similarity to the figure of Plato in Raphael's *School of Athens*, which has been said, it seems forever, to be a portrait of Leonardo! Although there is no proof, it seems likely to retain its status. It is an extraordinarily beautiful drawing, the full, echoing curves of the beard obviating any need for a neck or bust behind it.
- C. There are about 10 late drawings each known as *The Deluge*, which were made at a time when Leonardo was studying the

movement of water. Like Heraclitus, Leonardo seems to have been fascinated with the ever-changing nature of water in all its forms, but what overwhelms us today is the sense of the ineluctable force of water in these drawings. They seem to us to be akin to the biblical deluge that destroyed (almost) all mankind. They have their roots equally in scientific observation and in theological and psychological awe.

- III.** Leonardo's art was only a portion of his incessant creativity, but even in its fragmentary and incomplete state, it offers us a look into one of the most penetrating intellects in history, whose theorems no less than his demonstrations continue to challenge us today.

### **Works Discussed:**

André Dutertre:

*The Last Supper*, 1788–1794, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

Leonardo da Vinci:

*The Last Supper*, c. 1495–1498, Refectory, Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan.

Study for the head of Judas, 1495–1497, Royal Library, Windsor.

*Virgin and Child with Saint Anne and John the Baptist*, c. 1507–1508, National Gallery, London.

*Self-Portrait*, c. 1512, Biblioteca Reale, Turin.

*Deluge*, c. 1511–1512, Royal Library, Windsor.

### **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapter 14.

Hartt, chapter 16.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Brown, David. *Leonardo da Vinci: Origins of a Genius*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

Marani, Pietro C. *Leonardo da Vinci: The Complete Paintings*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000.

Santi, Bruno. *Leonardo da Vinci*. New York: Scala/Riverside, 1990.

Steinberg, Leo. *Leonardo's Incessant Last Supper*. New York: Zone Books, 2001.

Temperine, Renaud. *The Little Book of Leonardo da Vinci*. Paris: Flammarion, 2002.

Zöllner, Frank. *Leonardo da Vinci*. New York: Taschen America, 2000.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What do you think is most remarkable about Leonardo's *Last Supper*?
2. Why did Leonardo not use the *buon fresco* technique for his mural of the *Last Supper*?



## Lecture Twenty

### Michelangelo—Florentine Works

**Scope:** Although the structure of this course means that only about one-third of Michelangelo's 75-year career is included, the immensity of what he achieved in 25 years requires three lectures to introduce. Vasari, in his biography of Michelangelo, had no doubt that the artist received his talents directly from God, who "graciously looked down on earth" and decided to have Michelangelo (1475–1564) born a Florentine to perfect the artistic "achievements for which Florence was already renowned." He concedes that Michelangelo was apprenticed to Domenico Ghirlandaio at the age of 14, but the idea of the "divine" Michelangelo was already established long before his death. Vasari did emphasize that his hero made careful copies of Masaccio's frescoes in the Brancacci Chapel and that his *Madonna of the Stairs* was in "the style of Donatello." The astonishing facility with which Michelangelo carved stone does seem an innate gift (he studied with no significant sculptor), which he nurtured by the study of both earlier Renaissance sculpture and, more important, ancient Roman sculpture. His *Bacchus*, carved in Rome, is a pagan god reborn, and in time, Michelangelo would fuse pagan antiquity and Christian faith in an original unity of intellectual and emotional power.

His first great religious sculpture, the *Pietà* in Saint Peter's, Rome, is a visual dirge, a poignant lament sung over a sustaining ground bass that is newly heartrending at every encounter. His twice life-size *David*, symbol of Florence, has (like *Mona Lisa*) suffered the indignity of countless parodies, but still, that observant head on a tensed neck is the embodiment of protective watchfulness. The *Doni Madonna*, the only finished example of his early forays into painting, is a powerful, complex image whose exact meaning is unclear. The exquisite *Bruges Madonna*, on the other hand, is direct and touching in its dignity, simplicity, and unity of form.

## Outline

- I. As a boy of about 14, having already been apprenticed to Ghirlandaio, Michelangelo came under the protection of Lorenzo the Magnificent, living in the Medici Palace and studying the sculptures in the Medici Garden, which became a sort of academy for young artists. It was an auspicious beginning; indeed, the work that Michelangelo accomplished by the time he was 30 would have sufficed to ensure his reputation, given that it included two sculptures whose immediate fame has never waned: the Saint Peter's *Pietà* and *David*. In addition to these two, this first lecture on Michelangelo will discuss four other early works of importance and beauty.
- II. The artist was perhaps 16 when he skillfully carved the relief called *Madonna of the Stairs*. It is comparable to the low-relief carvings of Donatello (see *Saint George Slaying the Dragon*, Lecture Four), but its spirit may already be called "Michelangelesque" in the monumentality of the brooding Madonna. She fills the full height of the panel, and in her solemnity, she anticipates some of his sibyls on the Sistine ceiling.
- III. In a contrasting vein, he carved the supple *Bacchus* (c. 1496–1498), who accompanied by a grape-devouring faun, seems to tipsily salute us. Bacchus is the god of wine but also a fertility god. He is often depicted as soft and fleshy, as here, and his lassitude is a symbol of sensual indulgence, in contrast to the rational control exemplified by Apollo. This sculpture, carved in Rome soon after Michelangelo's arrival in 1496, was surely done in emulation of the ancient sculpture that now surrounded him.
- IV. The *Pietà* in Saint Peter's (1498–1499) was commissioned by a French cardinal and ambassador to Rome, Jean de Bilhères, for his burial chapel (later destroyed, necessitating relocation of the sculpture).
  - A. The theme of Mary supporting her dead son originated in northern Europe and spread to Italy. Northern examples tended to emphasize the suffering of Christ and the anguish of the Virgin, but Michelangelo created a classical, stoic group. The composition, a broad-based pyramid, possesses a sense of serenity and nobility, but the emotional impact comes from the angular broken body of Christ laid above the massive groundswell of the Madonna's cloak.

- B. It is the most highly finished sculpture in Michelangelo's oeuvre, both in descriptive detail and surface polish. It is also his only signed work, and Vasari tells us that he signed it only after hearing it attributed to another artist.
  - C. The youthfulness of Mary has always attracted comment. According to Condivi, his biographer, Michelangelo explained that chaste women always kept their freshness longer and that the Virgin Mary's "flower of youth... was preserved... so that the virginity and eternal purity of the Mother of God could be demonstrated to the world... [But] the son of God was made incarnate... [and] it was better... that he should appear to have the age that he really had."
- V. Returning to Florence in 1501, Michelangelo soon was given the opportunity to finish a more-than-life-size figure begun nearly 40 years earlier. The abandoned sculpture was probably of David, and it was a *David* that Michelangelo completed in 1504.
- A. The block was very shallow, which presented difficulties that Michelangelo was able to surmount.
  - B. Originally, the figure had been intended for installation high on a buttress of the Duomo, but Michelangelo's *David* was instantly acclaimed and placed, instead, in front of the Palazzo della Signoria.
  - C. Just as the Virgin of the *Pietà* is surprisingly young, so this David is more mature than the biblical child-hero. It has been convincingly shown that Michelangelo fused David and Hercules, because both heroes were emblems of the Palazzo della Signoria (the city hall) and, by extension, of the Florentine Republic established after the expulsion of the Medici.
- VI. The only panel painting unquestionably by Michelangelo is the so-called *Doni Tondo* (1503–1504), which must have commemorated the wedding of Agnolo Doni and Maddalena Strozzi (the frame bears their coat of arms).
- A. The superbly heroic, tightly intertwined Holy Family is adapted to the circular format with great skill.
  - B. Behind them is a wall-like enclosure containing the child Saint John the Baptist looking up at the family and nude male figures whose significance has been debated. They might be interpreted as

figures awaiting baptism and admission to the realm of the New Law and its promised salvation.

- C. The bright and startling palette (orange abuts rose) heralds the colors now visible on the restored Sistine ceiling.

**VII.** The only sculpture that Michelangelo ever sent out of Italy is the *Bruges Madonna* (c. 1503–1505), named for the Flemish city in which it has remained, in the Church of Notre Dame, since about 1506.

- A. Carved soon after his return to Florence, it was sold in 1506 to a Flemish wool merchant.
- B. The compact composition, in which the standing child is completely enclosed by the mother's body, is at once warmly maternal and theologically symbolic. Nothing could be more winning than their relationship, yet the solemnity that pervades their features and the slow rhythms of the enveloping drapery disclose the deeper conception, with roots in Byzantine art.
  - 1. The suggestion of the enclosure of the womb, once expressed as a stylized oval, or *mandorla*, around the Christ Child, is here expressed through the arrangement of the Madonna's drapery.
  - 2. This meaning had also been evoked by Donatello in his *Virgin and Child Enthroned* in Padua.

### **Works Discussed:**

Michelangelo:

*Madonna della Scala* (*Madonna of the Stairs*), c. 1489–1492, Casa Buonarroti, Florence.

*Bacchus*, c. 1496–1498, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

*Pietà*, 1498–1499, Saint Peter's, Rome.

*David*, 1501–1504, Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence.

*Holy Family* (*Doni Tondo*), 1503–1504, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*Bruges Madonna*, 1503–1505, Church of Notre Dame, Bruges.

### **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapters 15–16.

Hartt, chapters 16–17.

### Supplementary Reading:

Freedberg, S. J. *Painting in Italy, 1500–1600*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971. Pelican History of Art.

Hibbard, Howard. *Michelangelo*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985.

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### Questions to Consider:

1. How would you describe and explain the marked differences between Michelangelo's *Bacchus* and his *Pietà*?
2. Where was the sculpture of *David* originally intended to be installed, and why was it placed elsewhere?

## Lecture Twenty-One

### Michelangelo—Roman Projects

**Scope:** This lecture is concerned, in part, with the art historical significance of Michelangelo, by which is meant his revivifying of the forms of antiquity and his ineradicable imprint on the art of the future. But Leonardo also enters into this lecture. In 1503, he was commissioned to paint a mural for a new council hall in the Palazzo Vecchio. The subject was *The Battle of Anghiari*, a Florentine victory over Milanese forces in 1440. In 1504, Michelangelo was engaged to paint a companion scene on the opposite wall, *The Battle of Cascina*. The two works have not survived, but their impact on those who saw them or the cartoons for them was profound and echoed down through the history of art. Through the various copies, Leonardo's composition had a transforming effect on subsequent battle painting, right down to Delacroix in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Michelangelo's painting, of heroic nude soldiers rushing to dress to fend off a surprise attack, was just as influential for painters of the figure in action. A large grisaille copy of about 1542 preserves the composition, and Rubens's early painting of *The Baptism of Christ*, which incorporates several of the dramatic poses, demonstrates the fame of the invention.

Michelangelo was present at the excavation of the Hellenistic sculpture group *Laocöon* in 1506. His intimate knowledge of this dynamic group (he even assisted in the restoration) fueled his art for the rest of his life; indeed, it even entered into the *Battle of Cascina*, on which he was still working at the time. Even his great figure of *Moses* (c. 1515–1516) derives its intensity, now internalized, from the agonized priest, Laocöon himself. The statue of the prophet is one of the orphans from Michelangelo's largest sculptural project, the tomb of Julius II. Planned to dominate the new Saint Peter's basilica, the tomb ended as a sad shadow of intended greatness in San Pietro in Vincoli. Two of its abandoned components, the so-called *Dying Slave* and *Rebellious Slave*, made their way to France, where they have long been in the Louvre and where the former, especially, has had a continuing influence on artists.

## Outline

- I. Two great military paintings, *The Battle of Anghiari* by Leonardo and *The Battle of Cascina* by Michelangelo, were commissioned by the Florentine government to decorate the Hall of the Five Hundred, newly built for meetings of the Council of the Republic, in the Palazzo della Signoria.
  - A. Leonardo was the first to be commissioned, beginning work on the cartoon for *The Battle of Anghiari* in 1503. Although the subject, a 1440 victory of Florence over the Milanese army of Filippo Maria Visconti, was assigned, the selection of the central event and method of presentation was left to the artist.
    1. Leonardo chose the battle for the standard, between contending horsemen, as his central motif, and the interlocked combatants were a miracle of design.
    2. When it came time to transfer his design to the wall, Leonardo experimented with a new technique that resulted (as with *The Last Supper*) in the rapid disintegration of his painting.
    3. For as long as the unfinished painting remained on the wall and fragments of the cartoon survived, the design was seen by thousands and copied by artists, whose records guaranteed that the lost painting would influence battle painters into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
      - a. Leonardo's painting is best known through a drawing and painting made by the great Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century (now in the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna).
      - b. In 1835, the leading French Romantic artist Eugène Delacroix painted a theme from a dramatic poem by Lord Byron, *The Combat between the Giaour and Hassan*, in which he based the composition on one of the copies of the Leonardo.
  - B. When Leonardo had been at work on his cartoon for about a year, Michelangelo was asked to supply a complementary painting, of a more distant military victory, *The Battle of Cascina*, which had been won against the Pisan army in 1364. Again, the precise choice of a moment in the battle was left to the artist.
    1. The choice was extraordinary for any artist but Michelangelo, whose interest in the male nude as an expressive vehicle was

already established. He selected a moment, related in the old chronicle, when the Florentine soldiers are bathing in the Arno or resting and one of their comrades bursts on the scene to warn them of attack. The soldiers frantically clamber from the river or to their feet, pulling on their clothes and body armor. It is not the most glorious of military moments, but it allowed Michelangelo an unsurpassed opportunity for the theme and variations on the male nude.

2. The transfer of this cartoon to the wall was interrupted in 1505 by a call from Rome. Pope Julius II summoned the artist to design his tomb for Saint Peter's Basilica, then being rebuilt. Although Michelangelo apparently began the actual painting by November 1506, during a two-month stay in Florence, it was never completed.
3. Engravings and drawings were made of parts of the cartoon, Michelangelo's own preparatory drawings were seen by some, and the impact of his individual figures was widely apparent in the work of other artists.
  - a. But only one complete record of the composition, or rather the central part of it, survives: a copy in grisaille probably made by Aristotile da Sangallo around 1542. This had an even greater effect on those who saw it and established Michelangelo's repertory of expressive poses as models for any artist dealing with the nude figure.
  - b. One example of this influence will have to suffice. While working at the Gonzaga court at Mantua, Rubens must have seen a copy. He borrowed heavily from it for the right-hand side of a large composition of *The Baptism of Christ* (c. 1605–1608) that he was painting for the Jesuit church in Mantua.

**II.** Michelangelo's return to Rome was under quite different circumstances than his initial visit; it was at papal command and for a project whose size can hardly be imagined.

- A.** Rome was a city still rooted in the late Middle Ages, but a pope from the della Rovere family, Sixtus IV, had begun to chart a course for its revival when he commissioned the building and decoration of a new papal chapel—the Sistine Chapel—thus introducing the Florentine Renaissance into the Vatican with one



sweeping act. The rest of Rome, and its aristocracy, began to emulate the new style.

- B. Julius II was also a della Rovere, and his decision to demolish the thousand-year-old Constantinian basilica of Saint Peter's and replace it with a huge new one was, to him, a logical continuation of his uncle's initiative.

III. Old Saint Peter's was replete with tombs of popes and other prelates, but they resided more or less modestly in side chapels and aisles. Julius II determined to make his tomb and the new Saint Peter's a unity, dictating that it be placed at the center of the vast crossing then being designed, which would place it directly over the supposed grave of the first pope, Saint Peter himself, and under the proposed dome that would top the piers.

- A. Several architects advanced plans for the new basilica, but it was Donato Bramante whose plan and elevation were initially followed most closely. Michelangelo did not regard Bramante kindly, but his own design for Julius's tomb was inextricably linked to the architecture.
- B. The tomb itself would have been a large architectural unit, with the bier and effigy destined for the summit of a three-tiered pyramid and a multitude of sculptures attached to it. It recalled imperial Roman funeral pyres and signified the pope's concept of himself as a new caesar.
  - 1. Michelangelo spent eight months at Carrara overseeing the quarrying of the necessary stone for the mausoleum, returning home at the end of 1505 to await the arrival of the material.
    - a. On January 14, 1506, a great archeological discovery was made. In a vineyard on the Esquiline Hill, near the ruins of the Baths of Trajan, a famous Hellenistic sculptural group, the *Laocöon*, was discovered. Michelangelo and the architect Giuliano da Sangallo were sent by Julius II to examine it and authenticate it as the work described by Pliny the Elder in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. (*Natural History*, chapter 36) as the masterpiece of the arts.
    - b. The group represented the priest of Apollo, Laocöon, and his sons, strangled by a serpent for revealing the ruse of the Trojan horse (Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book II). Michelangelo, present at the excavation, acquired a profound

comprehension of the work, even reconstructing a missing right arm (still preserved on the statue's base). The *Laocöon*, internalized, served as a source of emotive poses for the tomb project and for the Sistine ceiling.

- c. The pope abruptly put aside his plan for his tomb and ordered Michelangelo to paint the vast ceiling of the Sistine Chapel instead; we will discuss this undertaking in the next lecture.
2. Michelangelo ultimately had no choice but to put aside the tomb project to work on the Sistine ceiling, but first, he furiously fled Rome for Florence in August 1506, without permission. Reconciled with the pope, Michelangelo joined him in Bologna (just reconquered for the Papal States) for some 15 months, designing and casting a colossal bronze statue of Julius. Returning to Rome by April 1508, he reluctantly began preparations for the ceiling fresco.
3. The tomb project was not forgotten, and during the more than four years of labor in the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo continued to meditate on his ideas for the tomb. The pope died less than four months after the ceiling was completed, and the artist signed a second contract for the tomb with the heirs of Julius.
  - a. By now, however, the grandiose plans for Julius's tomb were essentially doomed, though the project was to drag on, unresolved, for another 30 years. With a Medici pope, Leo X, on the throne, Julius's much reduced tomb was naturally relegated to a position of secondary importance and, in fact, eventually to another church, San Pietro in Vincoli. The della Rovere heirs were disinclined to spend much of their inheritance on the tomb. Two of Michelangelo's most famous sculptures, the *Dying Slave* and the *Rebellious Slave*, were conceived as part of the original project for the tomb but were separated from it as the project shrank. Still, they represent an essential aspect of the original program and are fully comprehensible only as part of it.
  - b. The *Dying Slave*, perhaps begun soon after the completion of the Sistine ceiling in October 1512, has an expressive lassitude that seems less an expression of

death than of the moment before awakening. One possible explanation is the neo-Platonic concept of the body as the soul's prison and death as its release. In this view, the sculpture combines sensuality and spirituality in equal amounts.

- c. The *Rebellious Slave*, probably begun soon after (neither sculpture is finished), exhibits a more intense struggle that will lead to release. Both of the *Slaves* should be visualized as essentially attached to the base of the original three-tiered design. An alternative and more traditional interpretation is that these figures and others like them symbolized the arts, which languished at Julius's death.
- d. The *Moses* (c. 1515–1516), an overwhelming figure that was intended to be placed at one of the corners of the second story of the tomb, is the only statue from the original design to become part of the diminished final tomb. The great lawgiver, priest, and leader of his people was central to the pope's image of himself (as he had been for Sixtus IV in the first Sistine Chapel project). The extraordinary vitality of the pose, as Moses is about to rise in wrath, and of his flashing visage seem to be Michelangelo's re-imagining of the powerful body and agonized face of *Laocöon* but now as a visionary, not a doomed, priest.

### Works Discussed:

Artist Unknown:

*Laocöon*, 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., Museo Pio Clementino, Monumenti Musei e Gallerie Pontificie, Vatican State.

Eugène Delacroix:

*The Combat between the Giaour and Hassan*, 1835, Musée du Petit-Palais, Paris.

Michelangelo:

*The Dying Slave*, c. 1514, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

*The Rebellious Slave*, c. 1514, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

*Moses*, c. 1515–1516, from the tomb of Pope Julius II, San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome.

Peter Paul Rubens:

*Battle of Anghiari* (after Leonardo da Vinci's original, c. 1503), 1600–1608, Cabinet des Dessins, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

*Het doopsel van Christus (The Baptism of Christ)*, c.1605–1608, Koninklijk Museum Voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerpen (België).

Aristotile da Sangallo:

*Battle of Cascina*, (after Michelangelo's original, c. 1504), c. 1542, Collection Leicester, Holkham Hall.

### **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapters 15–16.

Hartt, chapters 16–17.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Freedberg, S. J. *Painting in Italy, 1500–1600*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971. Pelican History of Art.

Hibbard, Howard. *Michelangelo*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985.

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Wallace, William E. *Michelangelo: The Complete Sculpture, Painting, and Architecture*. Westport, CT: Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, 1998.

### Questions to Consider:

1. Given that they were soon lost, how did the two enormous paintings by Leonardo (*Battle of Anghiari*) and Michelangelo (*Battle of Cascina*) have such a profound impact on the history of art?
2. The only important figure designed by Michelangelo for the tomb of Julius II that is actually on the tomb is the figure of *Moses*. Why did both the pope and the artist consider Moses central to the tomb program?

## Lecture Twenty-Two

### Michelangelo—The Sistine Chapel Ceiling

**Scope:** In 1508, the Sistine Chapel (the papal chapel on the north flank of Saint Peter's) was decorated with a belt of frescoes just below the windows; these were painted around 1481–1482 by such artists as Ghirlandaio, Botticelli, and Signorelli, some of whose works we have seen. The vault was painted blue and decorated with gold stars. Twenty-five years later, Pope Julius II decided to have Michelangelo fresco the ceiling with Old Testament scenes from the Creation to the Flood. The artist is said to have protested that first, he was a sculptor, and second, he would not be able to continue work on the papal tomb discussed in the last lecture. The pope insisted, and Michelangelo obeyed, visualizing a program that must have been worked out by a Vatican theologian but that also seems to be in keeping with what we know of the artist's own intellectual and spiritual bent. In this lecture, we will focus equally on the narrative and symbolic subjects and their theological thrust and on the unparalleled formal inventiveness that Michelangelo brought to the Herculean task of designing and painting—essentially single-handedly—more than 5,700 square feet of ceiling surface in four years (1508–1512). It is the story of the most famous painted ensemble in European art.

### Outline

- I. Michelangelo considered himself a sculptor, not a painter, and indeed, although he had apprenticed to one of the busiest painters in Florence, Domenico Ghirlandaio, he had never completed a fresco of his own. (*The Battle of Cascina*, discussed in the last lecture, may only have had the design transferred from cartoon to wall before it was abandoned.) When Julius II ordered him to set aside work on the project for the pope's tomb, although the marble had already arrived in Rome, and prepare to paint the vault of the Sistine Chapel, the artist was incensed and probably concerned about the difficulties he faced in an unfamiliar medium.
  - A. Although popular legend has Michelangelo working all alone on the scaffolding, lying on his back and somehow managing all the

plastering and painting by himself, in fact, he was assisted by a team of Florentine artists experienced in fresco and hired by him. They began by removing the old layer of plaster frescoed with gold stars on a blue ground (c. 1480).

**B.** In brief, the design that Michelangelo developed is as follows.

1. The central spine of the ceiling as eventually painted by Michelangelo consisted of nine narrative scenes from Genesis, chronologically beginning with the *Creation of Light* (or *Separation of Light from Darkness*) above the altar and concluding with the *Drunkenness of Noah* at the entrance end of the chapel. They are designed as if they were easel paintings mounted on the ceiling. There are four large panels and five smaller ones. At the corners of each small scene are male nudes, painted as if real, and much larger than the figures in the biblical scenes.
2. On the area of the vault that curves down toward the walls, Michelangelo had 26 additional fields to paint. In the 10 largest fields, flanking the biblical narratives, he introduced seven Old Testament prophets, alternating with five pagan sibyls, also painted as if real. They are the largest figures on the ceiling. In the spandrels and lunettes above the windows, he painted the ancestors of Christ. In the four pendentives at the corners of the chapel, he painted four narrative scenes from the Old Testament that were interpreted as prefiguring Christian salvation. There are, in addition, many decorative figures, cherubs and the like, bringing the total number of figures to around 300.

**II.** Michelangelo began painting near the east or entrance end of the chapel and proceeded toward the altar. The first scene painted was the *Flood*. Of all the narratives on the ceiling, the *Flood* contains by far the greatest number of figures; is the only one with a comprehensive landscape setting; and because its figures are smaller in scale, is the least legible from the floor of the chapel. When the first section of scaffolding was removed, Michelangelo recognized the visibility problem and increased the size of his figures.

- A.** The next scene toward the altar is the *Sacrifice of Noah*, directly above the screen that divides the chapel into two sections below: the smaller area at the east, where invited lay persons could

congregate, and the larger sacred area leading to the altar. The scene after that is the *Fall of Man*. It is no accident that the depiction of man's expulsion from Paradise into the world of suffering and sin, of the knowledge of good and evil, takes place above this division in the chapel. It also demonstrates that the chronological progression of the Genesis scenes is not the theological progression. The theologically significant movement is toward the altar, toward the miracle of Creation and a time before sin existed and away from the earthly labors and sorrows expressed in the Noah story.

- B. The *Fall of Man* consists of *The Temptation* and *The Expulsion*, painted in a single composition. Michelangelo greatly enlarged his figures here and simplified his composition, resulting in an easily readable composition. Although Eden seems rather stark, it is still a telling contrast to the barren and lifeless plain into which the first couple exits. The Tree of Knowledge divides the scene precisely and is shared, as it were, by the tempter, who fully extends his arm to hand the fruit to Eve, and the angel, whose extended sword arm mirrors the tempter's.
- C. Between the *Fall of Man* and the *Flood* (and flanking the *Sacrifice of Noah*) is one of the immense prophets, *Isaiah*, whose prophesy, "a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel [Messiah]," prefigured the birth of Christ. Perhaps it was Isaiah's perceived connection with the salvation of the New Testament that dictated his placement between the destruction of sinful mankind and the salvation of Noah and his family, to whom the Lord of the Old Testament announced a new covenant of salvation between God and man (the covenant followed the sacrifice).

III. We have seen that Michelangelo turned increasingly to the nude male figure as the expressive core of his art, especially in *The Battle of Cascina*. On the Sistine ceiling, this continued, sometimes with clear justification, as in the *Creation of Adam*, and sometimes with little, as in the 20 nudes (*ignudi* in Italian) who flank the small biblical scenes.

- A. The *Creation of Adam* is so ingrained in the visual memory of Western culture that it is, like most icons, difficult to see freshly. But one must realize that nothing really like it had ever been seen before. A learned contemporary saw only an old man flying



through the air, not recognizing him as God and not mentioning Adam. To us, it is the most familiar image of the creation of man, and we might not instantly recognize some of the earlier types.

1. The composition shows two ovoid shapes, an incomplete one suggesting the curve of the earth with the Adam lying upon it, the other more complete and representing a great cloak in which God, amid small angels, floats rather than flies.
  2. The famous point of contact between the two outstretched hands placed against the spatial void between the two figures and understood as the passing of the life force from the Creator to his creation, now so pre-focuses our attention that we see little else.
  3. But the greater miracle of the artist's interpretation is in the rest of Adam: in the lassitude of his outstretched leg and the equally passive or inert quality of his right arm. Even the left arm must be supported by the left knee. Although his face is expressionless, the head is pulled forward involuntarily and a sense of stirring life, of the animation of inert clay, is seen.
- B.** The famous *ignudi* remain a mystery. They were unprecedented in sacred decoration.
1. They have been called "Christian athletes," but they are derived from the secular sculpture of antiquity. The *Laocöon* group contributed to their poses, but the most important source was the *Belvedere Torso*, a majestic fragment by the Hellenistic sculptor Apollonios. Many of the Sistine nudes are brilliant variations on the *Belvedere Torso* with reinvented limbs. They are superbly expressive in myriad ways, and they have had and still have a canonic authority whenever the human body is considered a principle wellspring of motion and emotion.
  2. Michelangelo's presumed homosexuality is relevant here, of course. But just as relevant is the likelihood that he suppressed all sexual impulses and that his known erotic or amorous passions remained platonic, un-acted upon except in his poems, drawings, and other art. He may well have been abstinent, as many clerics of his day were not. Above all, we must not make the mistake of considering his nudes as poster boys. The modern understanding of homosexuality bears little relation to the Renaissance context, and it should not be

interpreted beyond the obvious: an idealization of the male body, in the Renaissance sense of the dignity and potential of man and in the Christian sense of man created in the image of God.

IV. Two of the most memorable of the sibyls and prophets are the last two at the altar end, the *Libyan Sibyl* and *Jeremiah*.

- A. The sibyls were pagan women of antiquity who had the gift of prophecy. Their prophecies, which were interpreted by the Church as foretelling the coming of Christ, were recorded in the Sibylline Books. In this fresco, the *Libyan Sibyl* has turned to replace her great volume on its lectern. The superb turning posture of her body, which seems to pirouette on her toes, is one of Michelangelo's most magnificently conceived figures. She looks not at the book, but downward, toward the altar, as though toward the culmination of her prophecy.
- B. Opposite her on the south wall, the lamenting *Jeremiah* is a total contrast to the elegant, dynamic *Libyan Sibyl*. Facing forward, his massive figure is heavily draped. He holds no book, and his feet, crossed at the ankles, do not support his body. Yet he himself is the absolute expression of weight, not physical, but emotional. His entire body droops under this weight. It is the weight of his sorrow over the destruction of Jerusalem: "For this the earth shall mourn, and the heavens above be black... Let mine eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not cease." Like the sibyl, Jeremiah looks down but not at the altar. He sits above and looks directly down on the papal throne. The pope, like the prophet, carries the weight of that sorrow alone.

V. The two scenes from Genesis nearest the altar as one approaches are the *Creation of the Sun and the Moon*, followed by the *Separation of Light from Darkness*.

- A. The *Creation of the Sun and the Moon* is the most dynamic tour de force among all the biblical narratives imagined by Michelangelo. From out of the void, God rushes into the picture in a whirlwind of creation. With his right hand, he creates the sun (with the same gesture that made Adam), while extending his left hand behind him, he creates the moon. There is clearly no time to waste; to the left, he rushes off into space, still creating, because we see plants, earthly vegetation appearing in the lower corner of the tableau.

This awesome Creator, Michelangelo's astonishing invention, is the God that has dominated the Western imagination of the divinity ever since.

- B. Above the altar, a mysterious form revolves in a more constricted space in which light and dark are in flux. Here, we do not see the face of God, only his spiraling body, as he looks upward into the void and with his outstretched arms begins the *Separation of Light from Darkness*.
- C. Immediately below this primal mystery, on the curve of the vault, is another prophet, *Jonah*. It is Jonah, of course, whose allegorical three days in the belly of the whale ("great fish") was understood to refer to the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of all Christian souls. Here, freed from the "belly of hell," Jonah looks straight up, in amazement, for above his head, the first moment of Creation is in progress. His astonishment is our astonishment. Below him, and below the Creation, is the papal altar, where the Christian mystery of the Mass, the symbolic ritual of the sacrifice, is enacted daily. The vertical iconography, this tower of theological significance, is a potent summation of faith.

### **Works Discussed:**

Apollonius:

*Belvedere Torso*, 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., Vatican Palace, Vatican State.

Michelangelo:

The Sistine ceiling (1508-1512) and details: *Flood; Fall of Man; The Temptation and The Expulsion; The Prophet Isaiah; Creation of Adam; Nude (Ignudo)*, flanking *Separation* on the southeast corner; *Libyan Sibyl; Jeremiah; Creation of the Sun and the Moon; Separation of Light from Darkness; Jonah*, Sistine Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican State.

### **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapters 15–16.

Hartt, chapters 16–17.

### Supplementary Reading:

Freedberg, S. J. *Painting in Italy, 1500–1600*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971. Pelican History of Art.

Hibbard, Howard. *Michelangelo*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985.

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Sueur, Hélène, et al. *The Little Book of Michelangelo*. Paris: Flammarion, 2003.

Tolnay, Charles de. *Michelangelo: Sculptor, Painter, Architect*. New Haven: Princeton University Press, 1975.

Wallace, William E. *Michelangelo: The Complete Sculpture, Painting, and Architecture*. Westport, CT: Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, 1998.

### Questions to Consider:

1. How did Michelangelo organize the frescoes on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, compositionally and narratively?
2. The number of individual nude figures (the *ignudi*) on the Sistine ceiling is striking. How might they be explained, or justified, in this papal setting?

## Lecture Twenty-Three

### Raphael—Madonnas and Portraits

**Scope:** The youngest and most short-lived of the three great central Italian masters of the High Renaissance, Raphael (1483–1520), came from the hill town of Urbino, seat of the dukes of Montefeltro. Always called Raphael in English, he was the son of Giovanni Santi, a passable painter who died when his son was 11. Soon, Raphael was sent to Perugia to apprentice to Pietro Perugino, an accomplished artist who had recently contributed four frescoes to the 1481–1482 cycle in the Sistine Chapel. Only one survives, *Christ Giving the Keys to Saint Peter*, and it is a work notable for its command of the illusion of deep space. The main figures, as they do throughout this narrative series, stay resolutely in the foreground plane, but the carefully plotted space of the piazza behind them, leading to a centrally planned temple-like building flanked by a palace and a triumphal arch, had hardly been seen in Renaissance Rome before. Raphael based his own *Marriage of the Virgin* on this work, but he condensed and monumentalized it in a manner that became his own.

Raphael has long been identified in the public mind with his many paintings of the Madonna and Child. Typically serene and balanced, they have been so often reproduced that it requires special attention to see their virtues and appreciate their variety. Three contrasting examples will be discussed: the tall, noble half-length called *Madonna del Granduca*; the full-length group in a landscape known as *Madonna of the Goldfinch*; and the famous circular (*tondo*) composition, epitome of the High Renaissance style, the *Alba Madonna*. The *Sistine Madonna* is a special case. Flanked by saints, this majestic figure dominates an altar painting that may also have commemorated the late Pope Julius II. Raphael was a superb portraitist, here represented by likenesses of *Julius II*; of *Baldassare Castiglione*, celebrated author of *The Courtier*; and of *Bindo Altoviti*. While the second of these ranks as one of the supreme portraits of the High Renaissance, the third signifies a startling turn away from the ideals of that brief cultural moment.

## Outline

- I. His name was Raffello Santi (or Sanzio), and he was from Urbino, an independent principality northeast of Florence. He is usually known, always in English usage, as Raphael (see I.A.2. below). Born in 1483, in a working life of scarcely 20 years, he created a body of art that seems the embodiment of the Renaissance, especially its brief culmination that we call the High Renaissance.
  - A. His father, Giovanni Santi, was a capable artist who died when his son was 11. Thus, his principal teacher was Perugino, with whom he apprenticed in Perugia at the end of the century. He adopted Perugino's style and observed the workings of a large painting studio engaged on many projects. Just before Raphael's birth, Perugino had been a principal member of the team of artists invited to Rome by Pope Sixtus IV to decorate the new Sistine Chapel. We have already had occasion to discuss this project several times.
    1. Working with a master of such distinguished accomplishments and credentials gave the young painter both technical skill and, eventually, entrée to important clients, especially in Rome. But Raphael's art soon moved into a different stylistic sphere. His art became more condensed, more focused, and more monumental than Perugino's.
    2. A comparison of Perugino's *Christ Giving the Keys to Saint Peter* (1481–1482), his most significant fresco in the Vatican, and Raphael's *Marriage of the Virgin* (1504) succinctly summarizes the stylistic shift. Incidentally, it is from Raphael's Latinized signature inscribed on the cornice of the temple in the *Marriage of the Virgin*—"Raphael Urbinam"—that we derive the accepted form of his name.
  - B. "Raphael's Madonnas"—to the art-knowledgeable person, the words conjure at the least a generic image of the Madonna and Child, serene and lovely, imperturbable and noble. In later centuries, they spawned countless imitations, honorable or meretricious. But Raphael's images of the Madonna are, in reality, so varied and inventive that they continually surprise us.
    1. The *Madonna del Granduca* (c. 1504–1505) is a somber half-length figure in a tall format. The traditional red tunic and blue cloak of Mary are rendered in memorable variants of

those basic hues, colors of wonderful purity and harmony. The humility of her downcast eyes seems appropriate when we meet the gaze of the Child, at once softly human and solemnly “other.” Virtually all images of the child Jesus “predict” the sacrifice in some way. Here, the black background hints of the “darkness over the whole land” at the Crucifixion. (The name by which the painting is known refers to the grand dukes of Tuscany, who became rulers of Florence in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This picture came into grand ducal possession at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.)

2. The *Madonna of the Goldfinch* (c. 1505) consists of a group of full-length figures: the Madonna, the child Jesus, and the child John the Baptist.
  - a. The goldfinch, which Jesus offers to John, is a symbol of the human soul that flies away at death. The bird was said to have received its red spot from a drop of blood from the thorn-crowned head of Christ. The group, placed in the foreground of a lovely landscape, is composed as a pyramid as natural as it is solid. This design, which owes most to Leonardo, is the sure mark of a High Renaissance painting.
  - b. Despite its popularity, the painting has had a disastrous history. In 1547, it was shattered into 17 pieces in an earthquake. It was reassembled and, of course, much repainted. This is worth contemplating, because we seldom stop to think about the damage that paintings have sustained over the centuries and how much of the original work has often been lost.
3. A *tondo*, or circular painting or sculpture, is an ideal form closely associated with Renaissance art. The symbolic potential of its seamless perfection, or the reminder of God as both center and circumference of the universe, was exploited by artists (as well as architects in their ground plans).
  - a. The *Alba Madonna* (c. 1510), named for the Spanish family that owned it for generations, is one of the most admired of all tondo compositions and of Raphael Madonnas.
  - b. This Madonna, seated on the ground, is, with the two children, built into a composition of subtle complexity.

Her leg, her upper arm, and the alignment of the three heads establish a rhomboid that is set into the circular field and anchored by the horizon line.

- c. The soft blue haze of the distant hills creates an atmospheric perspective, convincing us of the depth of space behind the Madonna. Her turbaned head and her eyes fixed on the reed cross suggest a sibyl (such as Michelangelo was then painting in the Sistine Chapel) who foresees the Crucifixion. Moreover, the pose of the Christ Child reminds us of the resurrected Christ, who holds a banner.
- 4. The *Sistine Madonna* (probably 1513) is different from all other Raphael Madonnas. This majestic standing figure is the apex of a triangular group of figures that includes Saint Barbara and Saint Sixtus, who are presented to us in a *coup de théâtre* apparition revealed by drawn curtains. That the cloud-filled space they inhabit is infinite is indicated by the irresistible little angels who lean their arms on the lower edge of this opening, “like children in a swimming bath,” as one writer nicely put it.
  - a. It is probable that the altarpiece was commissioned by Pope Julius II for the Church of Saint Sixtus in Piacenza. That city had reverted “voluntarily” to the Papal States in 1512. Julius II, who as a cardinal had supported the building of the church, celebrated this reclamation.
  - b. Saint Sixtus was a much-revered early Christian pope and martyr, as well as patron saint of the della Rovere family. Julius’s uncle, Francesco della Rovere, had taken the name of Pope Sixtus IV, and in the painting, Saint Sixtus is given the features of Julius II. He died in 1513, before the painting could be installed at Piacenza.

II. Raphael was also a great portrait artist, though not a prolific one. His earliest portraits, painted in Florence, are strong likenesses although rather matter of fact and without much penetration.

- A. His mature Roman portraits, after 1510, are another matter. His *Pope Julius II* (1511–1512) resonates with the purplish-crimson of his cap and cape against the deep green curtain, illuminated by the brilliant white of his long robe.



1. The careworn face (with the unprecedented papal beard that he wore from June 1511 until March 1512) and the unquiet hands convey much of the force of the old warrior-pope.
  2. This particular composition, the seated three-quarter-length figure in three-quarter profile, that we take for granted was, in fact, an influential innovation. Raphael used it to suggest that the viewer is having an audience with the pope. According to Vasari, it was so like the much-feared Julius that “everyone who saw it trembled as if the Pope were standing there in person.”
- B.** Raphael’s portrait of *Baldassare Castiglione* (c. 1514–1515) is an indisputable, indeed incomparable, masterpiece. It is the embodiment of the ideal of humanism—a person whose intellect and emotions are in perfect harmony and under the control of wisdom. The portrait is a flawless consonance of gray, black, and flesh tones, of perfectly defined volumes and persuasive description, and is, in every sense, the true likeness of this good friend and famous author of *The Courtier*, the book inspired by court life at Urbino (which we will explore in Lecture Twenty-Five).
- C.** During the second decade of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, change was in the air—political, theological, and for the artist of the High Renaissance, stylistic. Even a single portrait may be a harbinger of such change, and that of *Bindo Altoviti* (c. 1515) is a prime example. The buoyant self-confidence in the wholeness of man and society exemplified in the portrait of Castiglione was giving way to a profound unease. The foundations of society were beginning to be shaken, and the next dozen years would bring catastrophic change to Rome itself. Asymmetrical, uncertain in pose, dropped half into ominous shadow, the portrait is in such total contrast to that of Castiglione that the attribution to Raphael has sometimes been doubted. Although it is accepted today, such doubts are easy to understand, because the psychological and stylistic shift is remarkable.

## **Works Discussed:**

Perugino:

*Christ Giving the Keys to Saint Peter*, 1481–1482, Sistine Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican State.

Raphael:

*Marriage of the Virgin (Sposalizio)*, 1504, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

*Madonna del Granduca*, c. 1504–1505, Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.

*Madonna of the Goldfinch*, c. 1505, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*The Alba Madonna*, c. 1510, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

*The Sistine Madonna*, probably 1513, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie, Dresden.

*Pope Julius II*, 1511–1512, National Gallery, London.

*Baldassare Castiglione*, c. 1514–1515, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

*Bindo Altoviti*, c. 1515, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

## **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapters 15–16.

Hartt, chapters 16–17.

## **Supplementary Reading:**

Jones, Roger, and Nicholas Penny. *Raphael*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

Santi, Bruno. *Raphael*. New York: Scala/Riverside, 1991.

## **Questions to Consider:**

1. Raphael's Madonnas are famous. How are they presented, and what are their major characteristics?
2. What accounts for the immediacy of Raphael's Cinquecento portraits when compared to the painted portraits of the preceding century?

## Lecture Twenty-Four

### Raphael—History Paintings

**Scope:** History painting, that is, grand narrative painting of scenes from the Catholic religious tradition, from mythology, or from political and military history, was not invented in the Renaissance, but it was raised to the level that it was to occupy until the post-Napoleonic period by the artists of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is best understood not merely as storytelling, but as the way the human body can express the stories. Although Leonardo and Michelangelo made extraordinary contributions to this repertoire, it was probably Raphael who had the most long-lasting impact on history painting by virtue of clarity, balance, and the complete integration of noble figures with measured volumes of space. The word *idealism* might have been coined for his art, and despite the vicissitudes of historical criticism, his serenity has most often been seen as the embodiment of the Renaissance.

Both his early *Entombment* and his magnificent *Galatea* share a notable characteristic: Dramatic action and movement are counterbalanced through composition or pose, achieving stasis and balance. But it is in his monumental frescoes for the *stanzae* (“rooms”), the official papal apartments, begun at the same time as Michelangelo’s nearby Sistine ceiling, that Raphael established the canon for future history painting. The *Disputa* and *School of Athens* are intellectual history paintings, not about events but about theological and philosophical ideas. The fact that they have succeeded (especially the latter) in becoming embedded in the visual consciousness of the Western world, despite their abstruseness, is astonishing. These two seminal works will receive most attention; then, the *Expulsion of Heliodorus* will be seen to exhibit the same turn from High Renaissance nobility and calm that we saw in the last lecture in the portrait of *Bindo Altoviti*.

### Outline

- I. Raphael’s history paintings, his narrative subjects, are of epochal importance. Most of them are virtual definitions of the High Renaissance style.

- A. The *Entombment* (1507) was painted for a church in Perugia and is still 15<sup>th</sup> century in composition, the figures arranged in a frieze across the panel. It is carefully choreographed, both in the careful rhythms of the many feet that must suggest urgency and give support at the same time and in the grouping of heads. Everything is disposed in terms of movement and counter-movement, push and pull, effectively turning action into stasis.
  - B. In his famous *Galatea*, frescoed about 1513–1514 on a wall of the Villa Farnesina in Rome, Raphael depicts the mythological theme with High Renaissance compositional unity. The frieze of the *Entombment* is replaced by the magnificent central spiral of the Nereid or sea-nymph Galatea (a pose borrowed from his own *School of Athens*, as we shall shortly see), a completely picture-balancing figure in herself. A group of Tritons and Nereids on each side further anchors her in the center, while three *amorini* with bows triangulate above her head. The ardent giant Polyphemus who pursues her is not in this picture at all, though she looks back and up at him. The perfection of balance in this painting, achieved while representing dramatic movement, is a summation of a pictorial ideal that would serve as inspiration (and frustration) for future artists of similar aspirations.
- II. In 1508, Raphael was among the artists working on the decoration of one of the private apartments of Julius II. It was his library and situated near his bedroom. It is not certain how Raphael became involved in the project, although Perugino had done the ceiling decoration of an adjoining apartment. Soon, the painting of the entire *stanza* (“room” in Italian) devolved to Raphael. Later in the century, the room became known as the Stanza della Segnatura (roughly, “Signature Room,” after the name of the papal tribunal held there, whose acts the pope signed).
- A. Late in 1508, Raphael was probably working on the design of the *Disputà*, which is on one of the larger walls. It is assumed that this is one of his first works in the room because of the large amount of *secco* painting—pigment applied to the dry plaster—which suggests that the artist was still a bit unsure in fresco technique. The painting was probably finished in 1509.
    - 1. The theological subject is the *Disputation over the Sacrament*, whose central “mystery” is the Incarnation and in what way

the Mass represents the Incarnation. In art historical writing, the title is always given in its Italian-Latin form, *Disputà*.

2. In the two-tiered composition, the heavenly segment consists of God the Father, Christ, the Virgin, the Baptist, and an array of saints and patriarchs seated in a semicircular, apse-like space.
3. The lower level depicts a convention of theologians and others, from Saint Jerome to Dante, flanking an altar with the monstrance containing the Host (the consecrated bread representing the body of Christ) and avidly disputing the proper understanding of the rite of sacrament. They, too, are arranged in a semicircular composition.

**B.** Turning to the opposite wall, Raphael painted a philosophical subject, the magisterial *School of Athens* (1510–1511). The fresco has much less *secco* painting; Raphael has clearly mastered his medium.

1. The title, slightly misleading, was bestowed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The fresco was always understood to represent “Philosophy,” but it had no “title” in the modern sense. The *School of Athens* at least suggests the gravitas of the vast scene, pictorially expressed through the barrel-vaulted architecture, which may be based on Bramante’s designs for the new Saint Peter’s. It has even been suggested that the dominant architectural setting was designed by Bramante for Raphael.
2. It presents a complementary group of philosophers from classical antiquity engaged in conversation and pedagogy. In the center, framed by a succession of vaults, Plato and Aristotle slowly advance. Other ancient figures include Sophocles, Euclid, Ptolemy, Diogenes, and Pythagoras.
3. Many of these classical figures are represented by portraits of Raphael’s contemporaries, including Bramante, Leonardo, and Michelangelo.

**III.** In the next apartment, the Stanza d’Eliodoro (Heliodorus), Raphael’s style undergoes a striking development.

- A.** The room takes its name from the subject of the most action-filled painting there: the *Expulsion of Heliodorus* (1511–1512).

1. The story is told in the second Book of the Maccabees, a history of the Jews during the Seleucid dynasty. Heliodorus had been sent to demand that the Temple in Jerusalem surrender its treasure to the king. As he leaves, he is beset by an angel on horseback accompanied by two scourge-bearing angels who have answered the prayer of Anias, the priest seen kneeling at the central altar.
  2. The fallen Heliodorus must be based on an ancient sculpture, perhaps similar to the famous *Dying Gaul* (c. 240–200 B.C.), in reverse of course, or perhaps, an amalgam of parts from several sculptures.
- B.** Pope Julius II makes an unexpected appearance in this story from the Old Testament (Apocrypha). He is carried in on a litter from the left side to view the defeat of Heliodorus, which is generally interpreted here as symbolic of Julius's defense of his papacy against the challenge of cardinals aligned with the king of France.
- C.** All of the calm that had characterized the frescoes in the Stanza della Segnatura has been dispelled by a spatial construction that exaggerates the recession.
1. There is a rush into the central space that is enhanced by the abrupt alternation of light and dark shadow. There are two distinct axes of interest in the painting—the praying priest and the collapse of Heliodorus—and they are in conflict, pulling our eyes back and forth.
  2. As does the portrait of *Bindo Altoviti*, the *Expulsion of Heliodorus* marks a momentous shift from the serene balance of the High Renaissance to the disruptive, emotionally charged asymmetries of a style that will come to be called *mannerism* and that will dominate much of the rest of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.
  3. It is notable that this stylistic sea change arises in the Vatican, which fostered the most famous works of the High Renaissance, and in the work of Raphael (not just of his students), the epitome of that period.

## Works Discussed:

Artist Unknown:

*Dying Gaul*, c. 240–200 B.C., Capitoline, Rome.

Raphael:

*Entombment*, 1507, Galleria Borghese, Rome.

*Galatea*, c. 1513–1514, Villa Farnesina, Rome.

*The Disputà* and *The School of Athens*, from the Stanza della Segnatura, 1508–1511, Vatican Palace, Vatican State.

*Expulsion of Heliodorus*, from the Stanza d’Eliodoro, 1511–1512, Vatican Palace, Vatican State.

### **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapters 15–16.

Hartt, chapters 16–17.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Jones, Roger, and Nicholas Penny. *Raphael*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

Santi, Bruno. *Raphael*. New York: Scala/Riverside, 1991.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. What is meant by the term *history painting*?
2. What is the subject of Raphael’s so-called *Disputà*?

## Lecture Twenty-Five

### Urbino—Microcosm of Renaissance Civilization

**Scope:** Today, Urbino seems a magical world tucked away in its own hilly landscape, an escape from modern civilization. But in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, owing to the ruling house of Montefeltro, it commanded a larger territory and an outsize importance. The Montefeltro was a dynasty of *condottiere* (“mercenaries”) since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, whose apogee was the short career of Federico da Montefeltro (1422–1482), first count, then duke (1474) of the stronghold in the Marches. Its location near the Adriatic meant an awareness of different political and cultural centers (Venice, Dalmatia).

Federico was an almost equal blend of soldier and scholar, an ideal Renaissance balance of the active and contemplative lives, and that was the key to the richness of his court. Within their palace-fortress, he and his redoubtable wife, Battista Sforza, surrounded themselves with beauty and culture. His reputation and wealth enabled him to summon artists and architects to Urbino—from Dalmatia, from Flanders, from Florence and Siena. And he had one great artist in the neighborhood: Piero della Francesca, who became intimately associated with Federico’s court. The gem of the palace is the small private study of the duke, the *Studiolo*. This refuge nourished the intellectual resources of the duke, yet he had only to walk a few steps to his loggia to view the territory he governed, and beyond the hills lay the wider world in which he led armies.

His successor, Guidobaldo, with *his* refined duchess, Elisabetta Gonzaga, continued the culture of the court. It was there that the young Baldassare Castiglione spent many evenings in late-supper conversation, which served as the setting for his book *The Courtier* (1527). Alas, the book appeared long after the early death of Guidobaldo (1508), when Urbino was losing its independence.

### Outline

- I. Our examination of the art of Raphael offers a nice segue to a lecture on the place in which he was born, the extraordinary city-state of Urbino. Had he been a generation older, Raphael would certainly have



been in the artistic service of the famous duke of Urbino, Federico da Montefeltro, whose dedication to culture made his court one of the most refined in Italy.

- A. Piero della Francesca was patronized by Federico, and his portraits of the duke and duchess of Montefeltro were discussed in Lecture Ten. The reverse sides of these portraits are also painted, with allegorical *Triumphs* of the couple. Such imagery was popularized by the poetic “triumphs” of Petrarch. The duke’s chariot, drawn by a pair of white horses, carries the seated duke in full armor, crowned by Fame and accompanied by the Four Cardinal Virtues. The duchess, recently deceased, is accompanied by Faith and Charity and reads her prayer book while flanked, perhaps, by Youth and Age; her carriage is drawn by two unicorns, symbols of Chastity. The landscapes are very like those on the front and mirror that of Urbino’s countryside.
  - B. Federico and Battista Sforza created the renowned ambience of their court together, but in the first instance, the ducal palace is a fortress signifying the duke’s renown as a *condottiere*. Its huge mass crowns the rock around which the town gathers for protection.
- II. Like most palaces, it took form over many years and under many architects. Parts of it were never finished, such as the north and east façades facing onto large piazzas, where only a little of the marble revetment was attached to the brick walls.
- A. The most admired part of the palace is an inner courtyard in the purest Renaissance style, designed by the Dalmatian architect Luciano Laurana around 1465. His presence here reminds us of the proximity of Urbino to the Adriatic and the considerable movement of artists and others from one shore to another.
  - B. On the western façade, graceful superimposed loggias (open galleries) framed by two round towers (*torricini*) punctuate the long, massive, outward wall of the palace. This famous ensemble is also owed to Laurana, who however, left Urbino in 1472. He was replaced by the important Siennese architect and artist Francesco di Giorgio Martini.
- III. The vast interior is today the National Museum of the Marches and, therefore, largely devoid of furnishings. This makes it difficult to

envision the welcoming quality that these sometimes cavernous rooms must have had.

- A. The elegant vaulting and elaborately decorated fireplaces help the imagination. The long Throne Room, in the photograph we see, has some tapestries on the walls, which were, of course, standard practical decoration in palaces—practical because they diminished the cold emanating from the masonry walls and partly muffled the echoing spaces.
- B. The Hall of Angels (*Sala degli Angeli*) is named for the small dancing and music-making angels on the frieze of the great fireplace. The work of one Domenico Rosselli, these white and gold angels on a blue ground are reminiscent of Donatello's animated *putti* on the *Cantoria*.

IV. The *Studiolo*, or small study, of the duke of Urbino is one of the most famous rooms of the Italian Renaissance. Arranged and decorated between 1474 and 1476, it was the duke's refuge, his place of study, reflection, and correspondence. It held, as well, his wardrobe, cupboards for scientific and musical instruments, and a famous library (which, we are told, he regarded as "the crowning glory of his great palace"). Everything was on shelves concealed behind doors decorated with intarsia *trompe l'oeil* designs, some of which were themselves illusionistic replicas of the books, instruments, and armor they enclosed.

- A. The closets and their woodwork doors covered the lower walls of the *Studiolo*. Although nothing certain is known about the artists involved in the intarsia designs, several artists, including Botticelli, have been associated with the room, and skilled Florentine craftsmen, possibly from the workshop of Giuliano da Maiano, have been credited with the actual execution.
  - 1. The objects depicted in *trompe l'oeil* often seem to have been selected for their geometric or perspective complexity. Thus, the *Bird Cage and Clock* of one cupboard are marvels of mathematically precise illusionism.
  - 2. Elsewhere, standard *trompe l'oeil* effects are created, such as doors slightly ajar or a terrace glimpsed between piers with a landscape in the distance.
  - 3. Of course, everything is in the natural tones of the woods used, not painted, so that there is no question of a complete

illusion of reality, only constant astonishment at the artists' skill.

- B. Above the woodwork, the wall is hung with two tiers of portraits of famous learned men from antiquity to the duke's day. Justus of Ghent, a Flemish artist, was invited to Urbino to paint the portraits.

1. No particular logic governed the choice of the 28 illustrious men so honored. Christian and Hebrew and pagan, writers and popes and philosophers, some were friends or patrons of the duke. In sum, they represented a broad intellectual range, and we may assume that they were Federico's personal choice.
2. After 1474, Pedro Berruguete, a Spaniard from Castile, was brought in to complete portraits that Justus had left unfinished, for unknown reasons. Berruguete reworked the unfinished paintings completely, also changing the architectural settings.
3. All were removed in 1632 after the death of the last duke. Today, 14 are in the Louvre, and 14 have been reassembled in the *Studiolo*.

- C. No small part of the appeal of the *Studiolo* is its location within the palace. If he so desired, Federico da Montefeltro had only to take a few steps from his place of seclusion and he could be standing on the loggia of his twin-towered façade, master of all the tranquil landscape that lay below and beyond. Once more, the interplay between the active and the contemplative life so much discussed in the Quattrocento, and so completely exemplified by Federico, is apparent.

- V. The Cappella del Perdono in the palace has been tantalizingly suggested as the original location of Piero della Francesca's *Flagellation*, which we discussed in Lecture Ten. It could not have been the altarpiece, but it could have been the altar *frontal*, a step above floor level. The measurements agree and the low vanishing point of the perspective works smoothly from the slightly high point of view of one standing on the floor of the chapel.

- VI. The exalted air of the double portrait of *Federico da Montefeltro and His Son Guidobaldo* (c. 1477) marks it as a state portrait (it is still in the ducal palace, in the museum), consciously reflecting the dignity and diplomatic achievements of the duke.

- A. He wears the collar of the Order of the Ermine, bestowed by the king of Naples, and the Order of the Garter, from the king of

England. His dynastic pretensions are embodied in his young son, born in 1472.

- B. Guidobaldo married Elizabetta Gonzaga, and it was the famously cultured conversations stimulated by her salon that inspired Baldassare Castiglione to write *The Book of the Courtier*. In the rooms of the duchess, together with music and dancing, “sometimes intriguing questions were asked” or “there would be a sharp exchange of spontaneous witticisms.”
- C. It is also appropriate to look for a moment at a painting called *The Ideal City*, whose date and authorship are unknown. This painting is also today in the museum in the palace. Whether it is by the architect Laurana, as has been proposed, or someone else, this essay in perfection is believed by most to have originated in Urbino, in this circle of cultured idealists who were also men and women of the world. It resembles a strikingly rational stage set, to be *looked at*, but its vacantness is also apt to prompt some “intriguing questions.”

### **Works Discussed:**

Artist unknown:

*View of an Ideal City*, late 15<sup>th</sup> century, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino.

Attributed to Francesco di Giorgio Martini:

*Guidobaldo da Montafeltro*, 1490s, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino.

Pedro Berruguete:

*Federico da Montefeltro with His Son Guidobaldo*, c. 1477, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino.

Piero della Francesca:

*Portraits of Duke Federico da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza, Duchess of Urbino*, and reverse, c. 1465–1472, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*The Flagellation*, c. 1460, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino.

Justus of Ghent with Pedro Berruguete:

*Homer, Solomon, and Moses*, panels in the *Studiolo*, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino.

Raphael:

*Self-Portrait*, probably 1506, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

*Count Baldassare Castiglione*, c. 1514–1515, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Various artists:

*The Studiolo of the Duke*, and details, 1474–1476, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino.

### **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapter 9.

Hartt, chapter 14.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Castiglione, Baldesar. *The Book of the Courtier*. Trans. by George Bull. New York: Penguin Books, 1976.

Osborne, June. *Urbino: The Story of a Renaissance City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. What was the profession of Federico da Montefeltro, duke of Urbino?
2. What was the duke's *Studiolo*, and why was it so significant?

## Lecture Twenty-Six

### Andrea Mantegna in Padua and Mantua

**Scope:** This lecture takes us to Padua and Mantua. The expulsion of the Medici from Florence in 1494, followed by the turmoil surrounding the charismatic preacher/reformer Savonarola, resulted in a displacement of artistic development to other cities. Rome drew great artists for specific papal commissions, as we have seen, but no Roman school of artists emerged from their activity. Cities in the north of Italy had become increasingly important, innovative centers of art. Andrea Mantegna (c. 1430/31–1506) was born near Padua and apprenticed there until 1448. The strongest influence on him was Donatello, then at work in Sant’Antonio. The great bronze reliefs on the high altar, with their compelling illusion of pictorial space, inspired Mantegna to master perspective and foreshortening. He also developed a lifelong passion for classical antiquity, aided by continuous archeological discoveries on the Venetian mainland. Mantegna’s great Paduan achievement was the frescoes in the Ovetari Chapel in the Eremitani Church, almost entirely destroyed by bombs in 1944. His *San Zeno Altarpiece* in Verona combines the monumentality and spatial conquest of the frescoes with prominent ornamental swags already part of the Paduan tradition.

In 1460, Mantegna moved to Mantua, where he would remain for the rest of his life as court painter to the Gonzaga family. His most famous work there is the *trompe l’oeil* fresco decoration of the *Camera degli Sposi* (*Room of the Bride and Groom*) in the ducal palace. When finished in 1474, it had no equal in the field of illusionistic architectural painting. Giovanni Santi, Raphael’s father, reported that the frescoes made the visiting “Duke of Urbino stop in stupefaction.” They remained a powerful influence on artists for centuries. Mantegna’s startling foreshortening of *The Dead Christ* has many echoes in later paintings. Late in the century, the remarkable Isabella d’Este (wife of Francesco Gonzaga) commissioned Mantegna, among others, for paintings to adorn her *studiolo*, which housed her collection of precious objects.

## Outline

- I. Andrea Mantegna (c. 1430/31–1506) is one of the most individualistic artists of the late Quattrocento. The innovations of the Florentine Renaissance affected him strongly, but so did the qualities of color and stylization of the Venetian and Byzantine art amidst which he grew up. He was an avid archeologist, and his active involvement with the large numbers of Roman remains, architectural and sculptural, that were being unearthed in northern Italy accounts in great part for the notably tactile surfaces of everything he painted.
- II. Trained in Padua, Mantegna naturally adopted certain elements of the established Paduan style, including the device of decorative swags or garlands of fruit and flowers. But the most powerful influence on his art was the work of Donatello (whom he may even have known) in Sant'Antonio, which was drawing to a close in 1453 at just the moment when Mantegna, whose apprenticeship in Padua had begun around 1440 and concluded by 1448, inherited his first great commission.
  - A. He had been part of a team of young painters assisting the Venetian artists Antonio Vivarini and Giovanni d'Alemagna and the Paduan Niccolò Pizzolo in the decoration of the Ovetari Chapel in the Church of the Eremitani in Padua. The older painters died or withdrew from the project, as did some of the younger ones, and Mantegna found himself entrusted with the rest of the fresco cycle (1454–1457).
    1. The remaining subjects were four scenes from the life of Saint James, culminating in his execution. They reflect the artist's close study of Donatello's reliefs on the Santo High Altar and the brilliant perspective schemes they exhibit.
    2. *Saint James Led to Execution* is remarkable for its command of foreshortening and perspective, as well as its archeologically convincing setting of a Roman arch decorated with sculptural reliefs.
      - a. Because the bottom of the fresco was slightly above eye level, Mantegna paints the figures as seen from that viewpoint. The principal figures of the saint, the soldier, and the cripple are placed at the front edge of the scene where they can be viewed whole, while other figures further back are cropped below the ankles as the receding space seems to tilt downward.

- b. A command of perspective does not mean that the perspective system is consistent. On the contrary, artistic command or control of perspective means mediating between the desire for illusionistic re-creation of reality and the demands of the reality of the painted surface. The architecture in this fresco should also be drawn with lines that converge as the structures rise, but this would create the impression that the buildings were tipping into the space and severely compromise the visual stability of the chapel. Thus, Mantegna compromised a system for the sake of pictorial cohesion.
  - c. That the image we must study is an old black-and-white photograph is the consequence of the disastrous accidental bombing of the church by a U.S. warplane in 1944, which destroyed the Ovetari Chapel. A valiant attempt was made to reconstruct the frescoes from the flakes of painted plaster buried in the debris. It could have been worse, art historically, because the Arena Chapel, with Giotto's masterpiece, stands only a few hundred yards beyond the Eremitani.
- B. While engaged on the Eremitani frescoes, Mantegna received a major commission for an altarpiece. It was for the high altar of the imposing Romanesque church of San Zeno, in nearby Verona, whose abbot was a member of the aristocratic Correr family of Venice. This vast basilica terminates in the east with a raised sanctuary above the crypt, creating a prominent stage for the painting.
  - 1. The *San Zeno Altarpiece*, finished in 1459, appears at first glance to be a conventional triptych. But closer examination reveals the boldness of Mantegna's invention. The sumptuous classical frame was conceived as a sort of real portico for the unified painted space behind it, a courtyard defined by stone pillars carrying an architrave, beyond which crystalline clouds in a blue sky are seen. The space is inhabited by the *Enthroned Madonna and Child*, with child angels, flanked by four saints on each side. It is a major example of the *sacra conversazione* type, of which we have seen earlier examples by Fra Filippo Lippi and Domenico Veneziano.



2. The three *predella* panels are unusually large and may have been directly inspired by Donatello's large reliefs on the High Altar of the Santo in Padua. Two of them have been separated from the altarpiece and are in museums but have been replaced by copies.
  - a. One is in the Louvre: the *Crucifixion*, which was the center panel. It is bold in color, precise in drawing, and spatially expansive. The body of Christ is modeled like sculpture; because the top of the cross nearly touches the frame, the crucified figure isolated against the sky presses dramatically toward us.
  - b. One of the *predella* panels showed Christ on the Mount of Olives with the apostles sleeping below. Probably just afterward, Mantegna painted a slightly smaller independent version of the subject. Now in London (National Gallery), *The Agony in the Garden* is a powerfully expressive work. It features an extensive landscape, but one dominated by rocks. The apostles are stretched in sleep on the barren ground; Christ kneels in prayer on a rocky mount with an altar-like rock table in front of him. Above the background city (Jerusalem), two conical mountains rise. In the middle distance, Judas leads the soldiers to their quarry. All of this unyielding stone underlies the implacable progress of the narrative of Christ's Passion.
- C. Mantegna moved from Padua to Mantua in 1460, at the invitation of Ludovico Gonzaga. The city, unattractively situated in a swampy plain near three lakes, had always had to import its artists, but the Gonzaga family had cultural pretensions and importuned many talented painters, architects, composers, and writers to grace their court (and Mantua had been the poet Virgil's birthplace).
  1. In his first decade at the Mantuan court, Mantegna painted portraits, small paintings, some frescoes for a chapel, tapestry designs, and other decorative work typical for a court artist. He also made his first trips to Florence (where he saw Gozzoli's chapel in the Medici Palace) and to Pisa, apparently in study preparation for the decoration of a room in the ducal palace, the *Camera degli Sposi*.

2. The *Dead Christ*, a powerful painting, is undocumented and there is no consensus on its date. It has been dated as early as 1466–1467 and as late as 1500, because the painting was in the artist's possession at his death in 1506. We are using a recent dating of c. 1470–1474.
3. Many artists retain their work for personal reasons; that alone is not enough reason to date this painting late. On the other hand, the softer, gentler modeling suggests a stylistic change that is apparent in the frescoes in the ducal palace in Mantua. The question is well worth considering, because it directly affects our understanding of Mantegna's stylistic development.
4. It has been correctly observed that the two mourning heads at the left are unconvincing: They are crowded into the space, their faces are too harshly linear in comparison with the figure of Christ, and they distract from rather than enhance the effect. They may well have been added posthumously. Viewers may judge for themselves by blocking the figures out with a hand.

**III.** One project above all signifies the achievement of Mantegna during his Mantua years: the fresco decoration of the so-called *Camera degli Sposi* (*Room of the Bride and Groom*), probably begun in 1471 and completed in 1474. This room is one of the triumphs of Renaissance painted ensembles, charming and dignified by turn, perfect in scale, compelling in its many portraits, and representing a new level of achievement in *trompe l'oeil* effects and spatial illusionism.

- A. The name by which we know the room was given by a 17<sup>th</sup>-century writer, probably on the basis of the large inscription over a doorway trumpeting the names of Ludovico and his wife, Barbara. By contemporaries, it was known simply as the *camera picta*—"painted room"—and it was used for banquets and entertainments.
- B. There are two principal scenes on adjacent walls. The larger is the extraordinary group portrait of the family of Ludovico III Gonzaga, in which the artist incorporates the large fireplace on that wall as a sort of podium on which the duke and duchess sit, surrounded by their attendants, while others mount a staircase or stand on the mantle!

- C. The smaller scene depicts the meeting of Ludovico and his son, Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, on a shallow terrace opening onto an extensive landscape quite different from the marshes of Mantua. It has fertile fields near in and hills climbing behind, with a walled city and much classical architecture and sculpture.
  - D. In the center of the vault is a painted oculus, an illusionistic opening to the sky surrounded by a parapet, over which adult women peer at us while *amoretti* both look over and stand in front of the parapet, painted in the sharpest foreshortening. This foreshortening, called *di sotto in su* (“from below up”), is the earliest important Renaissance example of extreme illusionism on a ceiling, and though modest in size, it became the prototype and inspiration for three centuries of such decoration.
- IV. At court, other members of the Gonzaga family employed Mantegna during his long years there. The Marquis Francesco Gonzaga became the husband of Isabella d’Este. A learned and art-loving woman, she commissioned Mantegna for two paintings to decorate her *studiolo* cum treasury (she called it a *grotta*, or “cave”) in the Castle of Saint George, where she kept the rarities she amassed. One, *Pallas Athena Expelling the Vices from the Garden of Virtue* (c. 1500–1502), is an allegory remarkably stressing the role of a woman—a goddess, but probably a surrogate for the duchess—in protecting the realm of virtue in her highly cultured domain.
- V. Mantegna’s late style is sometimes criticized for dryness, but the unflinching intensity of *Christ as the Suffering Redeemer* (c. 1495–1500) is the epitome of a late masterpiece—all superfluous elements are eliminated. There is, nonetheless, a backward-looking character that is undeniable. The painting has the overawing immediacy of a Byzantine mosaic of the Pantocrator. It is not known for whom the painting was made, but one wonders if the fact that Mantua possessed a famous relic that attracted many pilgrims—a drop of Christ’s blood saved by Longinus, the centurion at the Crucifixion—influenced the presentation of the subject. Granted, the wounds of Christ are notably bloodless, but they are starkly presented.

## **Works Discussed:**

Andrea Mantegna:

*Saint James Led to Execution*, c. 1455, destroyed, Ovetari Chapel, Church of the Eremitani, Padua.

*Saint Zeno Altarpiece*, 1456–1459, Church of Saint Zeno, Verona.

*Crucifixion*, predella from the *Saint Zeno Altarpiece*, 1456–1459, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

*Christ on the Mount of Olives (The Agony in the Garden)*, c. 1460, National Gallery, London.

*Dead Christ*, c. 1470–1474, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

*Camera degli Sposi*, c. 1470–1474, Palazzo Ducale, Mantua Pallas.

*Pallas Athena Expelling the Vices from the Garden of Virtue*, c. 1500–1502, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

*Christ as the Suffering Redeemer*, 1495–1500, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen.

## **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapter 12.

Hartt, chapter 15.

## **Supplementary Reading:**

Camesaca, Ettore. *Mantegna*. New York: Scala/Riverside, 1992.

## **Questions to Consider:**

1. What are the principal stylistic characteristics of the early paintings of Andrea Mantegna?
2. Can you describe Mantegna's innovations in the *Camera degli Sposi* in the ducal palace in Mantua?

## Lecture Twenty-Seven

### Venice—Byzantine, Gothic, and Renaissance

**Scope:** Venetian art is inseparable from the city that inspired it, to a degree unparalleled elsewhere. Established on more than 100 islands in the vast Adriatic lagoon as a refuge from barbarian invasions in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, Venice elected its first *doge* (duke) near the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. She received the remains of Saint Mark in 829 (and, with them, religious prestige second only to Rome) and, by the 11<sup>th</sup> century, had become one of the greatest maritime trading powers in Europe. Although its mainland holdings in Dalmatia and Greece and on the nearby *terra firma* of the Italian peninsula were in constant dispute, Venice was one of the few states in Europe that was essentially free from conquest. The city as we still know it remained independent, and admired for its independence, for a millennium, until it was ended (in the name of liberty) by Napoleon Bonaparte.

At the core of the city are the ducal palace and the Basilica of San Marco, its patron saint. The huge, famous square in front of San Marco focuses on the Byzantine church, which is astonishing in its incrustation of marble slabs, columns, capitals, and sculpture, inside and out, much of it brought back from Constantinople after the Venetian sack of that great capital in 1204 during the Fourth Crusade. Chief among those treasures were the famous *Bronze Horses* and the enamel plaques for the *Pala d'Oro* (“*Golden Altarpiece*”), but the church itself was a marvel of Byzantine architecture and craftsmanship, with glowing mosaic decorations of surpassing beauty. The ducal palace was built in the European Gothic style; thus, the two buildings aptly represented Venice’s place between those two worlds, between east and west.

From the beginning, Venetian painting was preoccupied with light, the light of glowing mosaics and the light of the sky reflected from the water on which the city seemed to float. The flashing gold grounds of late-medieval painting lasted longer in Venice than elsewhere in Italy, well past the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century. When the Renaissance came, it was at first tentative, and no great civic building in the Renaissance style arrived until the middle of the

16<sup>th</sup> century, in the form of Sansovino's Library. Painting, however, had a phenomenal development, and in the next seven lectures, we will introduce the most famous among the renowned artists of Renaissance Venice.

## Outline

- I. To understand Venetian art, one must understand the city that inspired it. This may be said of other cities and their art, but nowhere is it more essential than here.
  - A. One must comprehend the improbable physical location of the city and how it came to be built.
    1. The barbarian invasions of the Goths and Huns in the 5<sup>th</sup> century drove inhabitants of northern Italy to seek refuge on small islands in the vast Adriatic lagoon. In the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century, the Lombard invasion caused a larger number of refugees to join them, and they fell under the protection of the eastern emperor in Constantinople.
    2. In the late 8<sup>th</sup> century, these settlers rebelled, prompted by the iconoclastic edict of Emperor Leo III, and sided with the pope. The first *doge* (the Venetian form of "duke") was elected soon after, initiating the 1,000-year history of the Venetian Republic.
    3. By the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Venice was a maritime trading power and had mainland possessions, but it was the security of its stronghold on the lagoon that guaranteed its independence.
    4. The lagoon can really only be grasped by flying over it or boating through it, when its extent and the challenge it presented to its settlers can be fully appreciated.
  - B. The building of the city was the engineering work of centuries and involved driving thousands of huge pilings into the bottom of the lagoon and building the city on that foundation.
    1. In the process, more than 100 islands were connected to make a contiguous whole, while the countless canals that had been formed were spanned with hundreds of bridges.
    2. The Grand Canal is a broad serpentine waterway dividing the city that gives Venice its distinctive appearance on a map.

3. It was bridged at only one spot, approximately the midpoint, by the famous Rialto Bridge, which marked the commercial heart of this famous trading city.
4. As a center of trade uniting the eastern and western Mediterranean and northern and southern Europe, Venice became one of the wealthiest cities in the world. Its extensive maritime trade routes indicate the scope of its activity.

**II.** The civic and religious center of the city is at the mouth of the Grand Canal, where it opens into the Basin of San Marco.

- A. From the basin or from the island of San Giorgio, the view of this administrative core of Venice is among the most famous cityscapes in the world. To the right, the gothic Doge's Palace is dominant; to the left, separated by the Piazzetta ("little piazza") is the library, and to the left of that is the mint. Behind these is the towering Campanile, and behind the Doge's Palace may be glimpsed the principal dome of the Basilica of San Marco.
- B. The Basilica of San Marco, one of the greatest late-Byzantine churches, is fronted by the enormous Piazza San Marco, one of the most imposing public squares in Europe.
  1. The Piazza San Marco did not have the huge, regularized form it has now until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when some buildings, including a church, were demolished and the piazza was completed at the west end. However, it was always the civic center of Venice.
  2. The basilica began its existence as the chapel for the Doge's Palace. The first structure was consecrated in 832, built to receive the supposed body of Saint Mark, brought from Alexandria to Venice in 829. Burned in 976 during a popular revolt, the basilica was promptly rebuilt.
    - a. The third and surviving church was begun in 1063; it was greatly augmented by the plunder brought back from the sack of Constantinople in 1204, during the Fourth Crusade, and after.
    - b. For more than seven centuries, the façade of the basilica was adorned with the famous gilded *Bronze Horses*, four magnificent Greek sculptures that had probably come from the Hippodrome in Constantinople. (They have been dated anywhere from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century

A.D.) In place on the façade by 1250, they were removed once by Napoleon, who vaingloriously took them to Paris, from whence they returned after Waterloo. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, they were permanently removed from the façade to save them from the acid rain and other pollution that assails Venice. Restored, they are now on the gallery inside the basilica.

3. The interior is clothed in sumptuous golden mosaics that, together with the volumes of the five domes and other vaulted spaces, create an effect of unrivaled splendor.
    - a. The mosaics are from many eras, but the most significant are from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. The *Creation of the World* (in one of the smaller cupolas in the atrium) displays the scenes in circular bands. Although they are at first difficult to distinguish, the individual scenes, like the stained glass in northern Gothic churches, become legible with practice (which was not necessary for contemporaries, who were familiar with the iconography of the stories).
    - b. The atrium contains a vast series of Old Testament scenes, originally created in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Among them is a scene in which Noah sends a raven and a dove from the ark. The dove, which has not yet taken flight, will find that the flood waters have not receded and return. The raven has alit on a floating corpse, which it appears to eat as carrion. The single drowned body floating near the ark is as eloquent as the host of bodies in a nearby mosaic.
  4. The plunder from Constantinople is further evidenced by the *Pala d'Oro* ("Golden Altarpiece"). It is a *retable*, a large rectangular surface mounted above the back of the altar table. It is encrusted with gold in which are set myriad gems, enamel plaques, and small medallions. The original *Pala* was made to order in Constantinople for Saint Mark's in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century. A century later, it was enlarged with plunder from the sack of Constantinople.
- C. We will have more to say about the significance of the relics of Saint Mark the Evangelist for the Republic of Venice.



1. A column stands on the Piazzetta near the water with a stone lion, the symbol of the saint, standing guard on its capital.
2. The Doge's Palace, one of the greatest Gothic buildings in Italy, dominates the waterfront. For Venice, it has an unusually open situation, with two sides easily visible at once.
  - a. The Doge's Palace was also the city hall, the seat of the highest magistrates of the republic and the site of the council chambers of the various governing councils.
  - b. Earlier structures preceded the existing palace, beginning in 814. Fire destroyed that and a second palace. A 12<sup>th</sup>-century palace was enlarged in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, then torn down in 1424 to be replaced by an extension that exactly replicated the 14<sup>th</sup>-century portion. A devastating fire in 1483 required extensive rebuilding, and fires in 1574 and, especially, 1577 gutted major parts of the interior, also destroying many paintings. The palace was rebuilt in the same style each time, resulting in the complete stylistic unity in the largest civic structure in Italy during the Renaissance.
  - c. Gracefully proportioned, the three-story structure is as open and airy as the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence is closed and massive. An open arcade is surmounted by an open loggia, and above that, the large expanse of wall is mitigated by pink and white stone in a large lozenge pattern. The elevation reverses the expected sequence of heavy supporting light. The palace seems to float above the piazza and the water.
  - d. Above the grand balcony on the Piazzetta façade is a sculpture group of Doge Andrea Gritti kneeling before the lion of Saint Mark.

**III.** Venice is pinned like a butterfly between water and sky, in a constantly changing, flickering light. It is a city whose ties to the Byzantine world filled many buildings with mosaics, in which a million cubes of colored stone and colored or gilt glass glistened with agitated light and color, reflecting the sun or lamps and candles.

- A. The gold ground painting of European Gothic art also flourished in Venice (and lingered longer), and the sheer brilliance of the gold seems magnified, perhaps influenced by the Byzantine models.

- B. Paolo Veneziano, one of the finest Trecento artists in Venice, painted the *Coronation of the Virgin* (c. 1358) for the no-longer extant church of Santa Chiara. The large central panel of the *Coronation* is flanked by eight smaller narrative scenes. The ensemble probably once had a painting of the Crucifixion above the Coronation.
  - C. A remarkable amount of gilding is still found in the imposing triptych of the *Madonna Enthroned with the Fathers of the Church*, dated 1446, by Antonio Vivarini and Giovanni d'Alemagna. This painting also has an elaborate Gothic screen behind the figures. This is a quarter century after Masaccio had revolutionized Florentine painting and the "new style" was well established.
  - D. In sum, Venetian painting is conservative by Quattrocento standards and would not change until the last third of the century.
- IV. The tentative acceptance of the Renaissance style in painting and sculpture was even more remarkable in architecture. No great civic building in the Renaissance style was raised in Venice until Jacopo Sansovino's Library, begun in 1537, after the High Renaissance had been pushed aside in other Italian centers. Surprisingly, it was erected opposite the great Gothic Ducal Palace.

### Works Discussed:

Antonio Vivarini and Giovanni d'Alemagna:

*Madonna Enthroned with Fathers of the Church*, 1446, Accademia, Venice.

Jacopo Sansovino, Biblioteca Marciana, begun 1537, Venice.

Various artists:

Basilica di San Marco and Replicas of *Bronze Horses*, façade, Venice.

*Bronze Horses*, Museo Marciano, Basilica di San Marco, Venice.

Dome showing the *Creation of the World*, with detail of Noah sending the dove from the ark, 13<sup>th</sup> century, Basilica di San Marco, Venice.

*Pala d'Oro*, Basilica di San Marco, Venice Doge's Palace, Venice.

Paolo Veneziano:

*Coronation of the Virgin*, c. 1358, Accademia, Venice.

**Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapter 13.

Hartt, chapter 15.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Hills, Paul. *Venetian Colour: Marble, Mosaic, Painting and Glass, 1250–1550*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

Howard, Deborah. *The Architectural History of Venice*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

Steer, John. *Venetian Painting: A Concise History*. London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1970.

Zuffi, Stefano, ed. *Art in Venice*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. The spectacular geographical situation of Venice is world famous. How did it directly affect the appearance of Venetian art?
2. What artistic style do you think was dominant in Venice? Why?

## Lecture Twenty-Eight

### Celebrating the Living City

**Scope:** It is hardly surprising that a city as astonishingly situated as Venice—with its multitude of smaller canals framing the long serpentine of the Grand Canal and its numerous smaller piazzas complementing the vast Piazza San Marco and adjoining Piazzetta—should be addicted to public ceremonies and processions, both on water and on land. All of the cities of Italy had such public occasions and recorded them in paintings, but nowhere outside of Venice did the state and its leading citizens so compulsively commission artists to paint so many and such large canvases to trumpet the beauties and virtues of the city. The physical splendor of Venice and the close identification of the state with religion combined to foster the desire for grand ceremonial paintings, often in ensembles or cycles.

Vittore Carpaccio (c. 1465–c. 1526) and Gentile Bellini (1429–1507) were two of the principal painters of such scenes. When Carpaccio was at the height of his fame, he painted an imposing *Lion of Saint Mark* for the Ducal Palace, where it has become one of the most well known of the multitude of images of the symbol of Venice. The narrative cycles he composed were commissioned by *scuole* (literally, “schools”)—confraternities, organized under religious institutions, whose activities were both charitable and social. Their meeting halls, whether small or large, were often decorated with paintings dedicated to their patron saints and were a focal point of Venetian artistic activity. Carpaccio’s paintings for the confraternity dedicated to Saint Ursula are now in the Accademia museum. They relate in vivid detail the legend of that mythical saint and her 11,000 virgins, against a background that reflects, even when it does not portray, Venice. A smaller group of charming paintings decorated Saint Giorgio degli Schiavoni, a confraternity of Slavs from Dalmatia, one of the Venetian territories.

Gentile Bellini, so famous at 40 that he was made a knight of the Holy Roman Empire, followed the Venetian connection to Constantinople, where he was in the service of Sultan Mehmet II

for two years. Upon his return home, he also painted large, multi-figured scenes of the civic life of Venice, one of which includes a famous representation of the Basilica of San Marco. At his death, he specified that a large unfinished painting of *Saint Mark Preaching in Alexandria* be completed by his brother, Giovanni.

## Outline

- I. In order to continue, in a sense, the tour of Venice begun in the last lecture, in this lecture, we will consider a notable category of Venetian art. This detour will briefly take us ahead of our story, to the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The category in question is cityscapes—paintings of urban settings and daily life.
  - A. Large Italian cityscapes had been painted before the Venetian scenes of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The most important was the enormous fresco *Effects of Good Government in the City and in the Country*, by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, painted in the Palazzo Pubblico (“city hall”) of Siena around 1340. These, however, are occasional efforts, whereas in Venice, the obsession with public ceremonies and processions, religious and civic, on land and on water, resulted in a more comprehensive body of cityscapes than was produced in any other city-state.
  - B. Two of the principal painters of this subject were Vittore Carpaccio and Gentile Bellini. Carpaccio was much the younger, but we will discuss him first in order to place Gentile in closer proximity to his brother, Giovanni (Lecture Twenty-Nine).
- II. At the pinnacle of his career, Vittore Carpaccio (c. 1465–c. 1526) was commissioned by officers of the republic to paint the *Lion of Saint Mark* (1516) for the Ducal Palace.
  - A. A virtual billboard of the symbol of Venice, about 12 feet wide, it has become, perhaps, the best known among the hundreds created. The winged lion is the symbol of Saint Mark, deriving from the Book of Revelation (4:6–8). The painting depicts the lion, his right paw on an open book with the words “*Pax tibi Marce Evangelista meus*” (“Peace unto you, Mark my evangelist”), spoken to Mark on the eve of his martyrdom in Egypt. Behind him to the left is the city itself (the Ducal Palace), as seen from the island of San

Giorgio Maggiore, and at the right is an allusion to the Venetian naval power.

- B. The Venetian institution of *scuole*, “schools,” that were, in fact, confraternities with religious affiliations, was of the greatest importance for the patronage of artists. Among Carpaccio’s patrons was the Scuola di Sant’Orsola (Saint Ursula), for whom he produced an extensive narrative cycle in the 1490s.
  - 1. The legend of Saint Ursula is fascinating, to say the least, because it involves the daughter of the king of Brittany, the son of the king of Britain, the pope, and 11,000 virgins. It is more like a fairy tale than a Christian epic, but it allowed for a great play of pictorial imagination.
  - 2. Although it does *not* take place in Venice at all, Carpaccio’s cycle constitutes what has nicely been called a “fantasy on the theme of Quattrocento Venice.” Architecture, decoration, costume, custom, and light all reflect the city he knew intimately.
- C. A much more modest *scuola*, San Giorgio degli Schiavone, secured Carpaccio’s services in the first decade of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.
  - 1. The confraternity, interestingly, was part of the important Dalmatian community in Venice (Schiavone = “Slav”).
  - 2. On the ground floor is one of the most charming of such cycles (originally on the second floor, the paintings were moved in the 16<sup>th</sup> century). It includes scenes of Saints George, Jerome and Augustine, ranging from whimsical drama to spellbound meditation.
- D. The Scuola of San Giovanni Evangelista (John the Evangelist) owned (since 1369) an important relic, a piece of the Holy Cross. Several artists contributed to a series of 10 paintings dedicated to this relic. Carpaccio painted *The Miracle of the Relic of the True Cross* (c. 1494), which is a rich portrait of a quarter of Venice and, at the same time, an indication of the sort of public celebrations that honored such miracles.

III. Gentile Bellini (1429–1507) had a remarkable international reputation, which led to his summons to Constantinople, where he was painter to Sultan Mehmet II for two years. Home in Venice, he turned his attention to large cityscapes with narratives, producing some of the best known examples.

- A. Like Carpaccio, Bellini also contributed to the series of paintings for the Scuola of San Giovanni Evangelista. His large canvas *Miracle of the Cross at Ponte San Lorenzo*, painted in 1500, is similar to Carpaccio's but fuller of incident, because the event involved diving into a canal for the relic, which had been dropped there.
- B. Unquestionably, Bellini's most famous canvas is the vast *Procession in Piazza San Marco* of 1496, nearly 25 feet wide, painted for the same *scuola*. It is a document of inestimable value because it shows the piazza and the basilica in precise detail. The event that it chronicles, a procession on the Feast of Corpus Christi in 1444, was known for the miracle that then occurred, when a Brescian merchant successfully invoked the aid of the relic of the Cross to save the life of his son.
- C. Gentile was at work on another huge canvas, *Saint Mark Preaching in Alexandria*, for the hall of the governing council of the Scuola di San Marco, when he fell ill and died in 1507.
  1. The Scuola San Marco for which this painting was made was influential precisely because it was dedicated to the patron saint of Venice. When some Venetian merchant-adventurers brought back the supposed body of the evangelist to Venice, they set in motion an extraordinary, self-sustaining phenomenon.
  2. From the moment that the relics were in Venetian possession, they were regarded as the sacred and civic justification of the state. First, their existence in Venice constituted another act in the long-running dramatic conflict between the Moslem and Christian worlds over the status of Jerusalem and Constantinople. Second, it underscored the long reach of the Venetian Republic and its dominant navy.
  3. The adoption of Mark's zoomorphic symbol, the lion, of course signified power. But it also announced the pacific intentions of the republic, because Mark was, after all, an apostle, a missionary, and bishop of Alexandria. The relics of Mark were to Venice what those of Peter were to Rome and considered second only to Rome in the dignity conferred.
  4. The life of Mark, but especially the posthumous liberation of his uncorrupted body (as pious legend had it), was the iconographic centerpiece of Venetian art and architecture.

5. In his will, Bellini specified that his brother Giovanni finish *Saint Mark Preaching*. The softly fused colors of many of the figures are in Giovanni's style. The most striking feature, however, remains the fanciful "Alexandrian" architecture, which is surely owed to Gentile.

### **Works Discussed:**

Gentile Bellini:

*Miracle of the Cross at Ponte San Lorenzo*, 1500, Accademia, Venice.

*Procession in Piazza San Marco*, Venice, 1496, Accademia, Venice.

Gentile Bellini and Giovanni Bellini:

*Saint Mark Preaching in Alexandria*, 1504–1507, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

Vittore Carpaccio:

*The Lion of Saint Mark*, 1516, Doge's Palace, Venice.

*Arrival of the English Ambassadors*, *Departure of the English Ambassadors*, and *The Dream of Saint Ursula*, from the Saint Ursula cycle, 1490–1496, Accademia, Venice.

*The Meeting of Ursula and Etherius and the Departure of the Pilgrims*, 1498, Accademia, Venice.

*Saint Jerome and the Lion in the Monastery*, 1502–1507, Scuola San Giorgio degli Schiavone, Venice.

*The Vision of Saint Augustine*, dated 1502, Scuola San Giorgio degli Schiavone, Venice.

*The Miracle of the Relic of the True Cross*, c. 1494, Accademia, Venice.

### **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapter 13.

Hartt, chapter 15.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Brown, Patricia F. *Venetian Narrative Painting in the Age of Carpaccio*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

Humphrey, Peter. *Painting in Renaissance Venice*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.



Muir, Edward. *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.

Pedrocco, Filippo. *The Art of Venice*. New York: Scala/Riverside, 2002.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What is the connection of Saint Mark the Evangelist to the Venetian state?
2. How did the *scuole* (confraternities) of Venice employ Venetian art?

## Lecture Twenty-Nine

### Giovanni Bellini—The Early Years

**Scope:** The career of Giovanni Bellini (c. 1430–1516), like that of his brother, seems to have begun in earnest only in his 30s, possibly because they both continued to work in their well-known father's shop rather than on their own. Extended families of artists were a particularly Venetian phenomenon. From the beginning, Giovanni became famous for his paintings of Madonnas. He also painted moving images of the *Pietà*, or *Lamentation*, in a peculiarly northern Italian half-length format. Despite repetition, his interpretation of these subjects and types rarely fails to touch us—his *Pietà* in the Brera in Milan is intensely poignant. He was Andrea Mantegna's brother-in-law, and their versions of *The Agony in the Garden* are compositionally similar but stylistically and expressively diverse. His powerful, close-up treatment of the *Entombment* was probably painted about 1474, the year before Antonello da Messina arrived in Venice for a two-year sojourn that profoundly affected the artistic development of Giovanni Bellini and of Venetian painting.

### Outline

- I. Both of the Bellini brothers were absorbed in the workshop of their father, Jacopo (c. 1400–c. 1470/71). Giovanni Bellini (c. 1430–1516) would eventually produce superb multi-figure altarpieces and mythologies. But from his emergence as an independent master in the 1460s and throughout his career, he was known for solemn pictures of the Madonna and Child and for very moving images of the *Pietà*.
  - A. The *Madonna with the Blessing Child* (1460s) shows a mournful Madonna protectively clasping the Child with both hands. She is upright; the Child stands on the balustrade, leans to the left, and though blessing, does not look at the worshipper who receives this benediction. Rather, his eyes are focused on the unseen, the Passion implicit in the black background. The half-length composition placed behind the sill or balustrade is a composition found in Jacopo Bellini's Madonnas that is used continuously by Giovanni. In the later *Madonna of the Trees* (1487), both figures

are severely vertical, placed in front of a “cloth of honor,” which is flanked by two delicate trees in a barely glimpsed landscape. This lyrical motif may be Giovanni’s own invention.

- B. Closely related compositionally is the theme of the half-length *Pietà*, in which the body of Christ is displayed by the Madonna and Saint John the Evangelist or by angels. Here, the sill may be read simultaneously as the edge of the sarcophagus and as the front of an altar, making the body of Christ a literal image of the Eucharist. This composition, with its frightful immediacy, is profoundly associated with Giovanni’s art. But it owes a profound debt to Donatello’s bronze relief of *The Dead Christ with Two Angels* on the High Altar in the Santo in Padua (Lecture Nine).

**II.** Giovanni Bellini’s sister, Nicolosia, was married to Andrea Mantegna in 1453. The two artists were, therefore, in regular contact.

- A. This explains the obvious similarity between Giovanni’s *Agony in the Garden* (c. 1465/70) and the same subject as painted by Mantegna (Lecture Twenty-Six). This classic art historical comparison is always rewarding. The implacable harshness of Mantegna’s sculptured scene is replaced by a tender vulnerability. It seems clear that Bellini was consciously creating a poetic alternative to the epic narrative of his brother-in-law’s painting. The figures are smaller, the sense of spiritual isolation is enhanced, and the end of the long night of prayer is announced by one of the loveliest dawns in Renaissance art, ironically revealing the imminent capture of Jesus (“the hour is come”).
- B. The monumental *Entombment* (c. 1475) is also a testament to the reciprocal relationship of the brothers-in-law. Mantegna’s stoic remoteness is felt here, despite the physical immediacy of the group, seen from a low viewpoint, explained by the original position of the painting as the crowning element of the large Pesaro Altarpiece, from which it was later separated.

**III.** At about the time Giovanni was painting the *Entombment*, there arrived in Venice an artist destined to alter the course of Venetian painting: Antonello da Messina (c. 1430–1479).

- A. Antonello’s *Saint Jerome in His Study* (c. 1475) exhibits one of the notable features of his art, his knowledge of Flemish painting: in the spatial organization (a fictive stone arch opening onto the

saint's study and views through windows at the rear of it), the descriptive detail and the numerous symbolic objects, and the use of the oil medium.

- B. In fact, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the painting was thought to be Flemish. It has sometimes been assumed that Antonello had visited Flanders, but in fact, the influence surely came from Flemish paintings and Flemish-trained painters in Naples, where Antonello spent his formative years.
- C. Antonello spent about two years in Venice. In the next lecture, we turn to the liberating influence of Antonello on Giovanni Bellini.

### **Works Discussed:**

Giovanni Bellini:

*Madonna with the Blessing Child*, c. 1460–1470, Accademia, Venice.

*Madonna of the Trees (Madonna degli Alberetti)*, 1487, Accademia, Venice.

*Pietà*, c. 1465–1470, National Gallery, London.

*Pietà*, c. 1465, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

*The Agony in the Garden*, c. 1465–1470, National Gallery, London.

*Entombment*, c. 1475, Pinacoteca, Vatican Museums, Vatican State.

Donatello:

*Christ as the Man of Sorrows*, 1447–1450, High Altar, Sant'Antonio, Padua.

Antonello da Messina:

*Saint Jerome in His Study*, c. 1475, National Gallery, London.

### **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapter 13.

Hartt, chapter 15.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Goffen, Rona. *Giovanni Bellini*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

### Questions to Consider:

1. How does Giovanni Bellini use the device of a painted sill, balustrade, or other foreground ledge in his paintings of the Madonna and Child and his paintings of the Dead Christ?
2. What are the similarities and differences between the *Agony in the Garden* painted by Bellini and that painted by Mantegna (Lecture Twenty-Six)?

## Lecture Thirty

### Antonello da Messina and Giovanni Bellini

**Scope:** Born in Sicily, probably trained in Naples, Antonello da Messina (c. 1430–1479) was apparently invited to Venice by the Venetian consul in Tunis, who offered him the major commission of the painting on the high altar in the Church of San Cassiano. The resulting painting was revolutionary. Antonello took an established type, the enthroned Madonna accompanied by saints (the so-called *sacra conversazione*—“sacred conversation”—which was more common in northern Europe), and placed the group in a fictive Renaissance architectural recess that was continuous with the real architecture framing the altarpiece. The *San Cassiano Altarpiece* was dismembered, but its innovations survive in the rich legacy of emulation by other artists, especially Giovanni Bellini in his radiantly calm *Saint Giobbe Altarpiece*, unhappily no longer *in situ*.

Of even greater significance was the example Antonello gave of the artistic possibilities of the oil medium. He did not introduce it into Venice, but his richly nuanced, atmospherically translucent, coloristically vibrant painting caused many of the painters of Venice to adopt oils. Antonello is no longer thought to have visited Flanders, where oil painting originated, but to have learned it instead from Flemish artists and art in Naples, where paintings by Jan van Eyck are known to have existed. In addition, into many of his paintings, Antonello introduced extensive landscape backgrounds (another Netherlandish contribution to art history). Landscape became still more significant in Giovanni Bellini's paintings, which often depicted Venetian mainland territory. In Giovanni's *Saint Francis in Ecstasy*, the breathtaking landscape becomes the true Franciscan protagonist. Wedding the lessons of Antonello to his own generous spirit, Giovanni Bellini became one of the greatest masters of the Renaissance.

## Outline

- I. When Antonello was apparently enticed to Venice by the offer to paint an altarpiece for the main altar of San Cassiano, he responded by designing a painting that broke the pattern for such paintings.
  - A. Although the *San Cassiano Altarpiece* (c. 1475/76) was later radically cut down and only a small portion of it exists, it is accepted that Antonello's design involved unifying the painted space inhabited by the enthroned Madonna and Child and eight life-size standing saints and coordinating it with the actual frame of the altarpiece.
  - B. The *sacra conversazione* type, with its origins in northern European painting, was not new. There were two major precursors in Venice and the Veneto. One was Mantegna's 1459 *San Zeno Altarpiece* (Lecture Twenty-Six), in which the real frame was continued by the architecture of the painted space, but the surface of the painting was still divided into three parts in the older Byzantine and Gothic manner. The other was the 1446 Vivarini *Polyptych* (Lecture Twenty-Seven), in which a unified space was created, but a highly artificial and unlikely one with its sense of a stage and its open top.
  - C. Antonello's altarpiece offered something significantly new in discarding the old tripartite format and providing a continuous progression from the viewer's space through the frame's "door" into the contiguous painted space.
  - D. The luminosity that the oil medium made possible was masterfully utilized by Antonello to model his faces with a minimum of line and an effect of light in shadow that resembled Leonardo's *sfumato* technique. His softly voluminous figures appeal to the eye and to the tactile sense.
- II. In 1475, Antonello painted two small versions of the *Crucifixion* that, although quite similar, contrast markedly in expressive intent.
  - A. The *Crucifixion* now in London (National Gallery) isolates the crucified Christ against the sky with a cup-like horizon below him and the arms of the cross nearly touching the sides of the frame. Below, the Madonna and Saint John the Evangelist sit on the ground, their backs also nearly touching the frame. It is a silent, iconic presentation.

- B. The *Crucifixion* now in Antwerp (Royal Museum of Fine Arts) presents a more complete Calvary, with the two thieves flanking a less dominating Christ and the Madonna and John seated further into the landscape. Still, no other figures from the narrative are present; indeed, the thieves seem to have been included for their expressive potential, given that their bodies are arched outward like a drawn bow, a seemingly small detail that manages to infuse the scene with almost unbearable pain.

III. Although it is not documented that Giovanni Bellini met Antonello, it is impossible that they did not, and despite the difficulty of dating Giovanni's paintings, it is equally unlikely that his art would have developed as it did without Antonello's example. Two of Bellini's paintings from the early 1480s provide evidence of that influence.

- A. The *Transfiguration* shows an increased interest in landscape painting and broad, structural brushwork made possible by the oil medium; both of these may be traced to Antonello.
- B. The *Transfiguration* is an unfamiliar theme to many viewers of this and other paintings. Indeed, it is often only partially understood theologically.
1. Jesus, together with Peter, John, and James, goes to a mountaintop to pray. The disciples witnessed Jesus "transfigured before them, and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." Then, they saw "Moses and Elias [Elijah] talking with him." By invoking the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah), the Gospels confer significant authority on Jesus.
  2. Bellini played down the visionary quality of the narrative, placing his figures on a modest rise with a rocky escarpment at the near edge. The Old Testament visitants are given immense dignity but in human terms. Bellini did follow the text in giving Jesus magnificent white robes. The Gospels make it clear that the apostles saw Moses and Elias and did not turn away from the sight. Rather, it was from the voice of God ("This is my beloved Son") issuing "out of the cloud" that they fearfully "fell on their face and were sore afraid."
  3. This scene, whose mystical, ecstatic potential made it popular in Byzantine art, was given a different interpretation by Giovanni. It has often been observed that he had a pantheistic



response to religion, that he expressed the divine through nature. Jesus's head and hands are in the sky, as it were, and the voice, which all can hear, is from the sky, a benediction over the serene landscape.

- C. Pantheism suffuses *Saint Francis in Ecstasy*, one of the most breathtaking evocations of light as a spiritually transforming force to be found in painting. It is set on the mainland, of course, because Venice itself offered no landscape vistas or features to support such a scene.
1. The saint, arms outspread, faces fully into the radiant daylight. He has already received the stigmata, and the subject is a less common one: a kind of hymn to nature, a communion with creation that is a hallmark of the story of Saint Francis. In fact, his mouth is open as if in song or prayer to "brother Sun."
  2. The descriptive catalogue of nature here is astonishing and fully reflects the influence of Flemish naturalism as introduced by Antonello. The cohesive spatial development, however, surpasses anything in Antonello and the landscape in Giovanni's own *Transfiguration*.

IV. Bellini's greatest surviving altarpiece from the 1480s further documents the importance of Antonello's example, while showing his increasingly monumental aspirations.

- A. While in Venice, Antonello had also painted a noble, life-size *Saint Sebastian* (1475–1476), framed by architecture and backed by a soaring sky. This beautifully poised figure, together with the *San Cassiano Altarpiece*, was immensely influential on Giovanni Bellini's *Saint Giobbe Altarpiece*.
- B. Bellini's *Saint Giobbe Altarpiece* (c. 1488) continues the innovative spatial unity of Antonello's now-fragmentary painting.
1. With a fictive barrel vault leading to an apse-like chapel with a half dome, the painted space continued the architecture of the altar frame (which still exists). Remarkably, the fictive architecture is given its true size in relation to the enthroned Madonna and six saints.
  2. The subtle and varied effects of light are capped by the imitation of a Byzantine mosaic in the half dome, probably a direct reference to the interior of San Marco.

3. Two of the saints are mostly nude, and the light slides eloquently across their bodies. One is Saint Sebastian, who strongly echoes Antonello's single figure. The other is Saint Job (Giobbe). (Venetians took interesting liberties with hagiography: Job, Jeremiah, and Moses are all sainted, with churches of their own!) Both of these saints are invoked for their curative power, Sebastian for the plague and Job (because of his many sufferings) more generally. The Church of Saint Giobbe was associated with a hospital.
4. Though not without precedent, the musical angels so persuasively and charmingly rendered by Bellini were soon emulated in Venetian painting and elsewhere in Italy.

### **Works Discussed:**

Giovanni Bellini:

*The Transfiguration*, c. 1480–1485, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples.

*Saint Francis in Ecstasy*, c. 1480–1485, Frick Collection, New York.

*The San Giobbe (Saint Job) Altarpiece*, c. 1488, Accademia, Venice.

Antonello da Messina:

*The Crucifixion*, 1475, National Gallery, London.

*The Crucifixion (Calvary)*, 1475, Koninklijk Museum Voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerpen (België).

*San Cassiano Altarpiece*, c. 1475–1476, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

*Saint Sebastian*, 1475–1476, Alte Meister, Gemäldegalerie, Dresden.

### **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapter 13.

Hartt, chapter 15.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Humphrey, Peter. *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

Rosand, David. *Painting in Cinquecento Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Antonello da Messina was in Venice for less than two years. Why was he so influential on the development of Venetian painting?
2. How is the architectural setting in Bellini's *Saint Job Altarpiece* so unusual?

## Lecture Thirty-One

### Giovanni Bellini—The Late Years

**Scope:** The serenity of Bellini's late work is astonishing. An example is the deceptively simple *Madonna and Child with the Magdalen and Saint Catherine*, which may show the direct influence of Leonardo da Vinci, who visited Venice in 1500. The painting holds the eye and stirs the imagination through its aura of spiritual restraint. The noble likeness of *Doge Leonardo Loredan* is apt to make the viewer think that it has never been surpassed in portraiture. Here, firmness of design is revealed by a crystalline light that seems to equate with moral and intellectual clarity. In Bellini's late Madonnas, the landscape of the *terra firma* underscores the emotion with unfailing aptness. The *San Zaccaria Altarpiece*, still in situ, is perhaps the first (1505) indisputable masterpiece of the Venetian High Renaissance. Bellini appropriated not only the architecture of the altar, but the light that falls from the western window into his painting. The resultant nobility and ineffable tranquility of his creation is beyond praise.

Near the end of his life, he completed a remarkable mythological painting for Alfonso d'Este, duke of Ferrara. *The Feast of the Gods* combines wit, sleepy sensuality, and the beauty of nature in the transformation of a lusty tale from Ovid into a poetic reverie. The painting has a deep musicality, a richness of tone, and an orchestration of form and narrative that fittingly rounds out the artist's career. It also offered a lesson and an opportunity to one of his many greatly talented students, Titian, who in an act of homage, repainted the landscape some 15 years later to better accord with his own paintings in the same room!

### Outline

- I. Like many long-lived artists, Giovanni Bellini developed a distinctive old-age style or, more correctly, manner. It was, in a word, serenity.
  - A. His *Madonna and Child with the Magdalen and Saint Catherine* (c. 1500) is typical. The three half-length women, disposed symmetrically, are placed against an impenetrable dark ground, lit subtly from the left.

- B. The mystery that emanates from the picture is reminiscent of Leonardo's art and provides the presumptive date of the picture, because Leonardo was in Venice in March of 1500.
- II. Bellini painted many portraits, but one outshines them all: *Doge Leonardo Loredan* (c. 1501).
- A. For some who stand in front of this painting, it is, for that moment, the *summa* of portraiture. Rectitude and reason are perfectly conjoined here. Descriptively, it is superbly painted, with every detail proclaiming its veracity and glowing with inner as well as outer light.
  - B. In October 1501, the doge had just been installed in the position he would occupy for almost 20 years, and this portrait must have recorded his accession.
- III. Bellini's late Madonnas, presenting the Christ Child or bearing the dead Son, are now often set in front of a landscape. Although still placed immediately in front of us, even cropped at the bottom to pull them closer, these images are infused with the poetry of the landscape. Bellini is indisputably the first great Venetian master of landscape painting.
- A. The *Madonna of the Meadow* (perhaps c. 1500) places the triangular group of mother and child in front of a landscape that has a prominent hill town in the background. Mary sits on the ground, a Madonna of humility (as in Raphael's *Alba Madonna*, Lecture Twenty-Three). The most notable feature of the painting, however, is the pose of the Child, unmistakably suggesting death and, therefore, foreshadowing the Passion to come. Death is also evoked by a vulture in the barren trees at the left. The expressive procession of clouds across the sky may recall Wordsworth to some minds: "trailing clouds of glory do we come, from God, who is our home."
  - B. The *Pietà* (c. 1505) is the inevitable sequel to the previous image. The more barren landscape and the architecture retreat into the distant landscape.
  - C. A *Madonna and Child* dated 1510 still uses compositional ideas that Bellini had developed 20 years earlier.
    - 1. When this painting is compared with the *Madonna of the Trees* (1487) that we saw in Lecture Twenty-Nine, it is clear

that Bellini has relaxed the format. The landscape wings flanking the Madonna and Child are not only more spacious but also more expressive.

2. On the one hand, the animated contour of the Virgin's robes ties the figures compositionally to the landscape, which is rich in human activity. On the other, these sacred personages remain resolutely separate from the world, seated in front of their "cloth of honor."

**IV.** Bellini's altarpieces are crowned by the *San Zaccaria Altarpiece* (1505), an enthroned Madonna with four saints that is still in situ.

- A. The church is one of the most venerable in the city, founded in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and once owning land that is the present Piazza San Marco. The altar for which Bellini painted this masterpiece is on the left wall of the broad church.
- B. The amplitude of the four saints is reinforced by the studied symmetry of the composition. Giovanni has, in a sense, cast a glance back at Byzantine symmetry, and once more (as in the *Saint Giobbe Altarpiece*), he closes the pictorial space with a half-dome Byzantine mosaic. It should be noted that the painting has been cut down at the top, qualifying the illusionistic effect.
- C. Bellini unites the architecture of the altar with the painting and unites both with the natural light that falls into the church from a window on the façade.
- D. The entire altarpiece seems to enfold space in an enveloping embrace, while projecting an inescapable aura of trance-like meditation. This is perhaps the first absolute masterpiece of the Venetian High Renaissance.

**V.** Bellini was a gifted teacher with talented pupils, including Giorgione and Titian, and in the last years of his life, he found himself in competition with them.

- A. His *Feast of the Gods*, dated 1514, was painted for the "Alabaster Chamber" of Alfonso d'Este, duke of Ferrara, who intended to gather in one room paintings by the finest living Italian artists. Although he was frustrated in his intentions, he nonetheless ended up with a Bellini and three Titians.
- B. Bellini was assigned his subject from Ovid's *Fasti*, which involved the Olympian gods drowsing after reveling. One of the sleeping

nymphs, Lotis, is coveted by Priapus, who steals in and begins to lift her skirt when the ass brays, everybody awakes, and Priapus is frustrated in his attempt.

- C. The painting, one of the artist's last, is a triumph of saturated color, indeed, a demonstration of what we mean when we speak of Venetian color.
- D. Although the duke was unable to secure paintings by Raphael and Fra Bartolommeo, Titian eventually painted the remaining three subjects. In order to harmonize Bellini's *Feast of the Gods* with his own works, he secured permission to alter the landscape background of the painting. Thus, the pupil literally succeeded the master, although Titian's changes should not be regarded as criticism of Bellini.

### **Works Discussed:**

Giovanni Bellini:

*Madonna and Child with the Magdalen and Saint Catherine*, c. 1500, Accademia, Venice.

*Doge Leonardo Loredan*, c. 1501, National Gallery, London.

*The Madonna of the Meadow*, c. 1500, National Gallery, London.

*Pietà*, c. 1505, Accademia, Venice.

*Madonna and Child*, 1510, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

(*San Zaccaria Altarpiece*, 1505, San Zaccaria, Venice.

*The Feast of the Gods* (altered by Titian), 1514, Widener Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

### **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapter 13.

Hartt, chapter 15.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. Who were Giovanni Bellini's most important pupils, and what did they learn from his work?
2. What do you think we usually mean when we speak of the *late style* of an artist, and how would you describe Bellini's late style?

## Lecture Thirty-Two

### Giorgione

**Scope:** The greatest of Giovanni Bellini's many pupils were Giorgione and Titian. The elder was Giorgione (1476/78–1510), the name by which we know Giorgio da Castelfranco, after his home town in the plain not far from Venice. He must have entered Bellini's Venice studio in the mid-1490s, when the latter's mellow, glowing late style was unfolding. Documents concerning Giorgione are few, but it is clear that the surviving works on which his later fame rested were all made in the first decade of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and most in the last six years of his brief life. Although he painted many highly esteemed frescoes with large-scale figures, they have not survived the Venetian climate and, in general, his extant work is small in size and intimate in mood. The poetry of Antonello influenced these works, and the translucent oil colors he had popularized were quickly appropriated by Giorgione, who applied them without preparatory underdrawing. His only surviving altarpiece, *The Castelfranco Madonna*, is distinguished by a classical simplicity of form and an airiness borrowed from the landscape background.

Giorgione may be best known for *The Tempest*, a haunting painting with a soldier and a nude woman and child flanking the opening into a lush, storm-menaced landscape. Musical analogies have often been made with Giorgione's art, supported by the knowledge that he was also an accomplished musician in a musically cultured city. In *The Tempest*, he has painted a sonata or *sinfonietta* comparable to one of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* (albeit two centuries earlier). The sonorous colors of the robes worn by the so-called *Three Philosophers* (they are certainly the three Magi) and their calm self-possession is also supported by an expressive landscape, although the left side of it has been badly damaged. It is a rare viewer who is not startled from complacency by the *Old Woman*, pointing to herself and bearing a paper inscribed *col tempo* ("with time"), referring to the inevitable loss of youthful beauty. It is an unusual departure from Giorgione's poetic idealism.



Vasari summed up Giorgione's high place in Italian art at the beginning of his biography of the painter: "While Florence was winning fame through the works of Leonardo, no less glory was conferred on Venice by the talents and achievements of [Giorgione], who greatly surpassed... every other Venetian painter up to that time." He died of the plague in his early 30s, but his work was continued seamlessly by the young Titian, with whom he had collaborated on a fresco project. The continuation was so seamless, in fact, that an art historical cottage industry has busied itself ever since trying to attribute certain key paintings to one or the other of these prodigious artists, which we, too, will analyze in the subsequent lecture.

## Outline

- I. Giorgio da Castelfranco (1476/78–1510), known as Giorgione, entered Bellini's large workshop when the master was entering his late, expansive phase. A sadly short life confined his career mainly to one decade, but within that narrow compass is a wide range of subjects, size, expression, and approach.
  - A. A small *Holy Family* (c. 1500) indicates how the poetry of Giovanni's paintings (and Antonello's, of course) stirred a responsive sensibility in the young man.
    1. The rich, saturated palette is learned from Bellini, although Giorgione's shifting, intermingled yellow and blue of the lining of the Virgin's robe is evidence of his own sensitive eye.
    2. The intimacy of this family group is the heart of Giorgione's particular lyric poetry. Even the view of the Bellini-esque landscape is scaled down to harmonize with the figures. The painting is a perfectly harmonized chord of color and form.
    3. Whether it was painted as an independent panel or was a *predella* panel of an altarpiece (such as the following) is unknown.
  - B. Giorgione's only surviving altarpiece is the large *Castelfranco Madonna* (c. 1505) painted for the Cathedral of Saint Liberale in his hometown not far from Venice, from which it takes its name.

1. The altarpiece is about 6 ½ feet tall, perhaps not large by Bellini's standards but possessing a scale that belies its measurements.
2. The Madonna and Child are greatly elevated, not on a pedestal but above an altar within the painting. This tall pyramid is flanked by Saint Liberale in armor and Saint Francis. Saint Liberale is the local patron saint, unlikely to be found elsewhere. A checkerboard pavement establishes the foreground space, and a landscape appears above a wall on either side of the Madonna, after the manner of Bellini.
3. The modeling of the Madonna's face is comparable to Leonardo's *sfumato*, if not so accomplished. Remembering Leonardo's visit to Venice in 1500, Giorgione's direct knowledge of his work is possible.

**II.** Soon after completing the *Castelfranco Altarpiece*, Giorgione worked on frescoes for the exterior walls of the Fondaco dei Tedeschi, the German merchant's warehouse on the Grand Canal. The folly of painting frescoes in the Venetian climate was soon proved by the nearly complete disappearance of the work.

- A. The Fondaco frescoes were mainly of large single figures, and the large oil painting (originally more than 5 feet high) of *Judith*, now in the Hermitage, is somewhat similar, though it may have been painted earlier (c. 1504).
- B. The subject is interpreted in a novel way. Usually Judith is shown in or near the tent where she slew Holofernes, and usually she holds the head or is placing it into a bag held by an elderly female servant. Here, she is shown as a female David, the head beneath her foot as in the sculptures by Donatello and Verrocchio, and holding a long sword by her side. The setting in an enclosed area, like a garden on a high hill with a sweeping view of the landscape, is also unprecedented for this story.

**III.** Giorgione's *Tempest* (c. 1505) is one of the most famous paintings in Renaissance art, one of the most evocative, and one of the most puzzling.

- A. Although the palette of predominantly green and blue-green inevitably makes the painting appear to be a pastoral subject, in fact, architecture vies with landscape for dominance.

- B. Two figures in the foreground landscape flank the painting: a nude woman suckling a child on the right and a soldier on the left. A stream is between them, a brick platform with two broken columns behind the soldier, stands of trees on both sides, and a bridge with buildings beyond in the center. The sky is charged with the oncoming storm that gives the painting its name.
- C. The interpretation of these elements has filled many scholarly pages, and what follows is simply my preferred explanation that accounts for some of what we see. The soldier, together with the broken columns, symbolizes Fortitude or Constancy; the woman and child, Christian love (*Caritas*, or “Charity”); and the threatening storm over town and country is a symbol of Fortune or Chance. The allegorical subject must have been dictated by Gabriele Vendramin, who commissioned the painting. Such emblematic subjects were common enough in paintings and in books; what is distinctly uncommon here is the subordination of the emblematic devices to the evocative landscape.
- D. Among other things, this is the first instance in Italian painting in which landscape is given the principal, not just a supporting, role.
- E. It has been discovered that Giorgione made substantial changes to his composition. Our purpose is not to discuss them but to point out that Giorgione painted directly onto the support without first drawing his composition on the surface and made changes if desired. This *alla prima* technique would not have been feasible without oil paints, and it is of great importance for the artist’s effects of ambient light, of a *sfumato*-like modeling of form and feature achieved directly through color, through which outline disappears in the colored mass of the surrounding atmosphere.

IV. The so-called *Three Philosophers* (c. 1508–1509) is also enigmatic and deeply poetic. Three handsomely dressed men—young, middle-aged, old—are grouped together in the right side of the painting.

- A. Their varied ages and their costumes suggest that they are probably the Magi on their journey to Bethlehem. The Magi are often cast as the three ages of man, and they came from the east. It has been suggested that they are waiting for the star to guide them to Christ’s birthplace, a story found in the *Golden Legend* and elsewhere.

- B. But are they *just* Magi? They have no entourage, no means of transportation. The title we use is not modern: *Three Philosophers* was bestowed on them by the writer Marcantonio Michiel who saw the painting in 1525, which might suggest that the subject was always ambiguous, that Michiel did not recognize them as the Magi. However, Jacobus de Voragine in his *Golden Legend* also noted that there is a “threefold meaning of the word *magus*.” He then elucidates the meanings, saying finally: “Or again, *magus* is the equivalent of wise man... in Greek a philosopher.”
  - C. Thus, they are both Magi and philosophers. Philosophy is the “mother” of the seven liberal arts, of which one is geometry, the measurement of the earth. The attributes of geometry are held by the youngest man: the compass (or dividers) and T-square.
  - D. It may be significant that this Magus-philosopher stares toward the cave that dominates the left side of the painting, a cave that might presage the rock tomb in which the crucified Christ was buried. Thus, as one scholar suggested, “the implicit meaning is the vanity of human wisdom in the presence of death itself.”
- V. That sentiment is also the explicit and undeniable meaning of *The Old Woman* (c. 1508/9).
- A. Here is a subject unlike any we have seen by Giorgione, an explicitly moralizing image reminiscent, for instance, of late-medieval paintings done at the time of the Black Death (Lecture One) or of northern European *vanitas* paintings, which were certainly known in Venice.
  - B. This beautifully painted old woman points at herself, while from between her hand and her body unfurls a paper bearing the words *col tempo*. “With the [passage of] time” you, too, will be as I am. It is surely significant that this emblematic painting was commissioned, like the emblematic *Tempest*, by Gabriele Vendramin. It is a measure of Giorgione’s tact, or genius, that he did not make the woman repulsive. It does not take great imagination to see the young woman through the veil of age.

## **Works Discussed:**

Giorgione:

*The Holy Family*, c. 1500, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

*The Castelfranco Madonna*, c. 1505, Church of San Liberale, Castelfranco.

*Judith*, c. 1504, The Hermitage, Saint Petersburg.

*The Tempest*, c. 1505, Accademia, Venice.

*The Three Philosophers*, c. 1508–1509, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

*The Old Woman*, c. 1508/9, Accademia, Venice.

## **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapter 17.

Hartt, chapter 19.

## **Supplementary Reading:**

Pignatti, Terisio, and Filippo Pedrocco. *Giorgione*. New York: Rizzoli, 1999.

Settis, Salvatore. *Giorgione's Tempest: Interpreting the Hidden Subject*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

## **Questions to Consider:**

1. Can you explain why Giorgione, whose art was created in only 10 years, is considered one of the most influential of Renaissance artists?
2. What do Giorgione's *Tempest* and *The Three Philosophers* have in common?

## Lecture Thirty-Three

### Giorgione or Titian?

**Scope:** This question has perplexed those who worry about such things—art critics and historians—perhaps more than it ought to. After all, the beauty or expressive power of the painting is what counts, is it not? Yes, but. If we don't know which works a particular artist made, we cannot, in fact, fully understand his art. Artistic style is more than visual handwriting; it is an expression of personality. To be able to think intelligently about the whole of an artist's work and to know where to draw the line between those paintings (in this case) demonstrably by the artist and the many that claim to be, anyone interested in painting needs to decide to whom to assign certain works whose dominant stylistic characteristics are shared by two or more artists. The problem is especially acute in large workshops, where a master may involve his students in the production of works commissioned from him or sold under his name. Attribution is also a problem in artistic collaborations in which painters sharing a studio absorb each other's ideas and methods or, in fact, sometimes work on the same picture, either as specialists in certain aspects (such as landscape or figures) or, as in the Giorgione-Titian problem, when one dies and the other completes his work.

The prologue was necessary to explain why we bother to revisit certain well-known paintings by Giorgione and/or Titian from around 1510. In this lecture, we will look first at the *Sleeping Venus*, a languorous nude in a landscape, then at the *Noli me tangere*, a sparse rendering of the post-Resurrection appearance of Christ to Mary Magdalen, in both cases with special attention to known changes in the composition. The *Adoration of the Shepherds* has been the cause of more acerbic argument than most such disputed paintings, including the dissolution of the business relationship between a famous art dealer and an even more famous art historian. The *Concert Champêtre* ("Pastoral Concert") in the Louvre has bounced back and forth between the two young masters. The standard modern catalogue of Titian believes it is by "Giorgione, largely completed by Titian"; the Louvre, its guardian, after a long period in which it allowed the painting to be a Titian,

has now returned it to the more precious (because smaller) oeuvre of Giorgione. The apparent portrait group called *The Concert* will be discussed in the light of undoubted portraits by Giorgione and Titian to prepare the way for our discussion of the early work of Titian in the next lecture.

## Outline

- I. We have not devoted much time to problems of attribution. This is an area of connoisseurship that is of great importance to scholars, curators, and dealers, but should it concern the average museum visitor and art lover? In the broadest sense, yes. There are documented works that we know a given artist made. There are others that we believe an artist made, because they are *like* the works we know that he made. To the degree that we—any of us—are uncertain about the latter group, we cannot fully understand the artist or the development of his work.
- II. The much-visited and hotly debated topic of this lecture—Giorgione or Titian?—is probably the most significant example of the importance of attribution in Renaissance art. It stems from the fact that the two young artists studied and worked in Bellini's studio (although Giorgione may have left before Titian arrived) and worked together on occasion. Add to that the early death of Giorgione, probably leaving some unfinished works that were completed by another painter (Titian?), and the scenario is clear. It is important to know which of them *invented*, as it were, certain paintings in order to understand both their individual achievements and the flow of influence from one to the other.
  - A. A recurrence of the plague in 1510 killed Giorgione. Marcantonio Michiel, whom we cited in the last lecture, reported in 1525 that the *Sleeping Venus*, "in a landscape with Cupid, is by Giorgio di Castelfranco; but the landscape and the Cupid were finished by Titian." This statement, so close to the creation of the painting, is usually (though not always) accepted as accurate, but it is still open to interpretation. For instance, "finished by Titian" need not mean invented or added by Titian, though some writers have deduced that from Michiel's words.
    1. First, two of the painting's most important characteristics—one stylistic and one expressive—must be highlighted. The elongated body of Venus, almost an elongated oval, is fitted into the curves of the landscape in the rising middle ground

and the left background and the cloudscape above. The cool, un-self-conscious classicism of the sleeping nude (which owes much to these stylistic devices) distinguishes Giorgione's Quattrocento temperament from the more sensuous and coquettish nudes of Titian and the Cinquecento.

2. The cupid can no longer be judged, because its badly damaged condition caused it to be painted over in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
3. The drapery has no precedent in Giorgione's earlier works and many echoes in Titian's later ones. Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that it is an addition by Titian. This assumption is supported by the observation that Venus does not lie on the drapery; rather, it is in front of her.
4. The hilly landscape in the right background is most likely by Titian, because he reused it in another painting, the *Noli me tangere*, in the National Gallery, London.

**B.** *Noli me tangere* is the post-Resurrection appearance of Christ to Mary Magdalen, and his admonition not to touch him ("let no one touch me"). The painting (c. 1512) was once also held to have been begun by Giorgione and finished by Titian.

1. The landscape, with an almost exact quotation of the buildings on a hill in the *Sleeping Venus*, would seem to disprove that theory. It is a landscape as typical of Titian as it is atypical of Giorgione, and although Titian finished paintings by Giorgione, he did not quote from them.
2. X-rays have shown that the figure of Christ and the tree behind him were greatly altered during painting. Most experts agree that the first pose and the changes were made by the same hand. Given that the figures are dramatic in pose, the consensus is that the hand was Titian's.

**III.** The *Adoration of the Shepherds* (c. 1505–1510), often known as the Allendale *Nativity*, has long been a centerpiece in the Giorgione-Titian controversy, not least because it was associated with art world stars.

- A.** The painting, which was then in an English collection, came into the possession of Lord Duveen, the English dealer whose principal expert on Italian paintings was the famous connoisseur and art historian Bernard Berenson.
- B.** Then, as now, a Giorgione is worth more than a Titian because of the extreme rarity of Giorgione's paintings. According to John



Walker, former director of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, Duveen purchased the painting in the 1930s, believing it to be a Giorgione, and sold it to Samuel Kress, a collector new to Duveen, as a Giorgione. Berenson, who was on retainer to Duveen Brothers, understood that his name was being used to support the attribution, with which he did not agree, and he terminated his connection with Duveen. Although the story has been told differently, the conclusion is always the same: a rupture between dealer and art historian over an attribution. Much later, Berenson listed the painting as a Giorgione finished by Titian.

- C. The Holy Family and shepherds are comparable to the *Holy Family* (also in the National Gallery in Washington) that we saw at the beginning of the last lecture. But there are portions of the landscape, specifically in the brushwork of the trees, that appear to some eyes as being clearly by a different painter. Still, despite unanswered questions, the majority opinion leans toward Giorgione.

IV. A much more famous painting, whose attribution has been even more contested, is the *Pastoral Concert* (c. 1510–1511), known more commonly as the *Concert Champêtre* or *Fête Champêtre* because it has been in the French royal collection and the Louvre since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, where its influence has been incalculable.

- A. Traditionally, it has been attributed to Giorgione since the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. When Manet used it as the inspiration for his *Luncheon on the Grass* in 1861, he believed it to be by Giorgione.
- B. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Titian's name was assigned to it with increasing frequency.
- C. In 1949, after pigment studies and X-rays showing design changes, it was proposed that the painting had been laid out and begun by Giorgione but completed by Titian. In other words, it was the same as the case of the *Sleeping Venus* but with the difference that Titian was considered to have done most of the actual painting, for reasons that will be discussed.
- D. Still, after a long period in which the Louvre accepted it as predominantly by Titian, by the 1990s, the museum had reassigned it to Giorgione.

- E. The subject matter is Arcadian, connected to poetry from Virgil to the Renaissance and suggestive of a golden age of perfect happiness for humanity. Allegorical meanings have been suggested, but little agreement exists on any more specific interpretation. In fact, literalism would be at odds with the sensuous, suggestive visual poetry of the *Pastoral Concert*. The golden age was the poetic invention of the Latin poet Ovid (*Metamorphoses*), and it captured the Renaissance imagination. This painting is one of the most evocative pictorial realizations of the first age of mankind before all the pleasures of nature—and, here, of music, as well—were lost.
- V. Giorgione left a few superb portraits, and Titian is one of the finest portrait painters of the Renaissance. The portraits discussed here are, once again, a reflection of the Giorgione-Titian mystery.
- A. The *Concert* (c. 1510–1512) reflects the poetry of Giorgione and the incisive psychology of Titian.
1. It is surely a triple portrait, but just as surely suggests some underlying meaning. The *clavicembalo* player is the most striking figure because of his incisively modeled features and active pose, turning his head sharply to look at the monk holding a *viola da gamba*, while the young man (the singer?) at the left looks at us.
  2. On one level, it alludes to the three ages of man, as did Giorgione's *Three Philosophers*. Music may allude to the passage of time, and during the Renaissance, music was considered an essential attribute of civilized man at every stage of life.
  3. Like many of the above paintings, it has been attributed to Giorgione, Titian, and Giorgione-Titian (among others). Titian has been favored during the past half-century.
- B. The *Portrait of a Young Man* (c. 1505) in Berlin is related in type (though not costume) to the young man in the *Concert*. Almost universally accepted as by Giorgione, it has his quiet poetry combined with a High Renaissance classicism that is less austere and remote than Giovanni Bellini's portraits and somewhat closer to those of Raphael. The parapet recalls the same device in *The Old Woman*.

C. The *Gentleman in Blue* (c. 1510–1512) is also placed behind a parapet, on which he rests his right arm in its voluminous sleeve. Though it has occasionally been attributed to Giorgione, it is almost certainly by Titian, and the initials *T V* on the parapet must signify Tiziano Vecellio, his full name.

1. We see, once again, the enhanced psychological edge that we soon come to associate with Titian. Where Giorgione is elusive, Titian is vigorous. Both can be mysterious, but a greater drama derives from the lost profile of the *Gentleman in Blue* (the head turning from darkness into light), as well as from the bold form and color. The boldness extends to the relation of sleeve to parapet. We have seen many examples of Venetian religious paintings and portraits in which the parapet defines the space or barrier (the picture plane) between the painted world and the spectator's world: Here, they are joined by the illusionistically protruding sleeve.
2. The painting was once thought to be a portrait of Ariosto, but the features do not agree with secure portraits of the poet. It has, however, been plausibly suggested that it is a proud self-portrait. Interestingly, it served as one of the models for a self-portrait by Rembrandt, who had seen and sketched it.

### **Works Discussed:**

Giorgione:

*Sleeping Venus*, c. 1508–1510, Gemäldegalerie, Dresden.

*The Adoration of the Shepherds* (The Allendale Nativity), c. 1505–1510, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

*Fête Champêtre*, c. 1510–1511, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

*Portrait of a Young Man*, c. 1505, Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

Titian:

*Noli me tangere*, c. 1512, National Gallery, London.

*Concert*, 1510–1512, Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.

*Gentleman in Blue*, c. 1510–1512, National Gallery, London.

**Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapter 17.

Hartt, chapter 19.

**Questions to Consider**

1. What is meant by *connoisseurship*, and what is the connection between connoisseurship and the attribution of works of art to particular artists?
2. Why has the attribution of the *Pastoral Concert* alternated between Giorgione and Titian for centuries? Who do you think painted the *Pastoral Concert*?

## Lecture Thirty-Four

### Titian—The Early Years

**Scope:** Born in the foothills of the Italian Alps, Titian entered Bellini's workshop in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, probably after Giorgione had left it. The imprint of Bellini is dominant in Titian's fresh, appealing *Gipsy Madonna* and still strong in an altarpiece now in Santa Maria della Salute, *Saint Mark Enthroned with Saints*. The altarpiece interweaves stylistic strands from Bellini, Antonello, and Giorgione. With Giorgione's tragic death from the plague, Titian (c. 1488/90–1576) had an unlooked-for opportunity to rapidly advance his career, and the rich blend of influences was soon transformed by his own burgeoning personality. As we noted in the last lecture, Titian was among the great portrait artists, and his *Young Man with Cap and Gloves* (c. 1512–1515) is an intimate, fluidly painted reverie that recalls Giorgione's work but has a breadth of form that presages Titian's mature painting.

About his famous *Sacred and Profane Love*, the first thing that must be said is that it is extraordinarily beautiful. That agreed, the allegorical subject presents complexities that have inspired scholars to insights and overreaching in equal proportion. In his *Madonna and Child with Saints George and Dorothy*, he invents a complex but focused variation on the theme using half-length figures, not behind a sill but as though in shared space with the viewer. Indeed, Titian's unflagging inventiveness is one of the marks of his particular genius.

Nothing can prepare the first-time visitor to the venerable Venetian Franciscan Church of the Frari for the impact of Titian's youthful masterpiece, *The Assumption of the Virgin*. Designed to harmonize perfectly with the Gothic apsidal chapel of the church, it is, at the same time, the supreme masterpiece of the Venetian High Renaissance, fully comparable to Raphael's frescoes in the Vatican *stanze*. It is joyous and dynamic, and the glorious reds of its principal figures resound to the far end of the nave, yet the stupendous composition achieves a monumental balance, a perpetual tension between motion and stasis, that is unforgettable.

Even as the *Assumption* was being unveiled, Titian was contemplating a new work that would hang beside *The Feast of the Gods*, the late masterpiece by his teacher, Giovanni Bellini, recently deceased (Lecture Thirty-Two). Alphonso d'Este had approached Titian, Raphael, and Fra Bartolomeo to paint mythological fables for the duke's private study, which already contained Bellini's. Titian's three paintings for Ferrara amplify and re-orchestrate Venetian lyricism. They are somewhat larger, but more important, they contain many figures in complex interaction. The ambitious choreography is realized to perfection. These paintings—especially *Bacchus and Ariadne* and *The Andrians*—are among the most beautiful and influential achievements of the Venetian Renaissance. They mark a new stage in Titian's art. The 1520s are a pivotal decade in Italian and European history and art, and the point at which we decided to conclude this course. As with Michelangelo, the long-lived Titian must be left in mid-career, indeed, much earlier, because he had 50 years of productivity ahead of him. We will, however, have an opportunity to glance at some of his later art in our last two lectures.

## Outline

- I. Not long after Titian painted the *Gentleman in Blue*, he painted a masterful portrait that shows a greater maturity, the *Young Man with Cap and Gloves* (c. 1512–1515).
  - A. It is a striking work that combines ideas from Bellini (the sitter faces out of the picture, does not look at the viewer) and Giorgione (the mood is deeply poetic, nostalgic), inspired by Titian's own contribution, the vividly realized strength of character in this self-possessed young man.
  - B. Coloristically, it is superb in the simple but brilliant contrasts of the black satin cloak, white shirt edged in red, rose sleeve and auburn hair, and in breadth of form, it anticipates Titian's mature style.
- II. The *Gipsy Madonna* (c. 1510) is similar to the Madonnas of Giovanni Bellini in the composition and in the landscape. Yet there are significant differences.

- A. It is fuller, more ample, especially in the drapery that gathers around her right arm. In fact, the silver-blue drapery of her cloak is quite comparable to the drapery (which has been attributed to Titian) in front of Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus*.
- B. The mood is also different from that of Bellini's Madonnas. The introspective melancholy of Bellini has been replaced by a rather placid, neutral quality.

III. *Saint Mark Enthroned with Saints* (c. 1511–1512) was originally painted for the Church of Santo Spirito in Isola, a monastery in the lagoon southwest of Venice, abandoned in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, at which time the painting was transferred to Santa Maria della Salute on the Grand Canal.

- A. Given that the four saints are Cosmas and Damian (doctors) and Roch and Sebastian (invoked against the plague), it seems likely that the altarpiece was occasioned by the plague and quite possible that it was Titian's personal memorial to Giorgione, his dead colleague.
- B. Saint Mark, impedestaed like a living statue, is flanked by the four saints, also statuesque and isolated. One is reminded of Giorgione's *Castelfranco Madonna*, and the figure of Saint Sebastian is a less classicizing version of Bellini's Sebastian in the *Saint Giobbe Altarpiece*.

IV. *Sacred and Profane Love* (c. 1514) is one of the key paintings of the Venetian Renaissance, very beautiful and equally enigmatic.

- A. The unusual ratio of width to height of about 2.4:1 may suggest that it was designed for a specific site, either on furniture or architecture. Titian also underscores the proportions by flanking a long, low sarcophagus with two female figures that incline slightly toward each other.
- B. The many interpretations of this scene, which at first glance seems straightforward, cannot even be broached as a list. The most widely accepted (or at least the best known) basic theory of the iconography is that of Erwin Panofsky as developed over decades.
  - 1. The nude woman is basically Venus (with Cupid nearby) but holding a flaming lamp. In Panofsky's neo-Platonic interpretation, she is Sacred (divine) Love.

2. The sumptuously clothed woman is Profane (that is, secular or human) Love. This skeletal explanation leaves numerous aspects of the painting unmentioned, but it is the most that can be said with any confidence.
  3. The painting has been persuasively shown to have been commissioned for the celebration of the marriage in 1514 of the distinguished Venetian official Niccolò Aurelio to Laura Bagarotto of Padua. Such nuptial paintings were frequently incorporated into the furniture of a bridal chamber, which may explain the unusual dimensions noted above.
- V. The *Madonna and Child with Saints Dorothy and George* (c. 1515, Prado, Madrid) is a wonderfully composed group, the figures quite subtle in their interlocking poses.
- A. The figures are placed in a draped, tent-like interior with a vent behind Dorothy opening to the sky.
    1. The Madonna, in a lustrous red and ultramarine costume, exchanges solemn glances with the Child.
    2. The Child's hand reaches for the roses and he overlaps the ample figure of Dorothy, who in turn, overlaps the armored Saint George, whose devout gaze toward the Madonna completes the composition's unstressed triangle.
  - B. The early history of this painting, which belonged to Philip II of Spain before 1593, is not known. It would be of particular interest because of the saints who attend the Madonna.
  - C. Both George and Dorothy are early Christian martyrs whose very existence is dubious. Saint George is, of course, famous as the patron saint of England, but Dorothy is scarcely known.
    1. In this painting, George is such a strong and descriptively specific figure that one suspects he is a portrait, conceivably of the donor.
    2. Dorothy is identified by the basket of roses she offers the Christ Child. As she was led to martyrdom, a lawyer mocked her and asked her to send him roses or apples from Paradise after her arrival there. Roses duly arrived, and he was converted.



- VI.** The Franciscan Church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, the most celebrated church in Venice after San Marco, was founded in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century. It is one of the great Italian Gothic churches (completed c. 1443), and it houses many monuments and tombs of Venetian notables and many artistic treasures, dominant among which is *The Assumption of the Virgin* (1516–1518). The doctrine of the bodily Assumption of the Virgin was of particular importance to the Franciscans, because it was defended by Saint Bonaventure, the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Franciscan theologian.
- A.** Titian, not yet 30 years old, was commissioned to paint an enormous altarpiece for the Cappella Maggiore, the chancel and apse with its high altar. The importance of the commission attests to his early reputation.
1. One hundred yards long, the church has a large enclosed choir just before the transept, but a gate on the axis permits the visitor to see the glowing *Assumption* through the choir from the end of the nave.
  2. Four stories of tall lancet Gothic windows rise from the floor to the vault of the apse, flooding the space with light. Although the stone carver who made the altar is known, it is assumed that Titian must have designed the altar, as well as the painting. This enormous structure required that four windows behind the altar be walled up before the painting, in its Renaissance frame, was set in place. Despite the contrast in style between the apse and the altar, it became an integral part of the architecture, effectually redefining it.
- B.** The space is towering, and Titian obviously was determined to dominate that space. To that end, he designed over-life-size figures in dynamic poses and brilliant colors.
1. The painting was executed in a room in the adjoining monastery. This was undoubtedly necessary because of its huge size (23 feet high, or half again as tall as Bellini's *Saint Giobbe Altarpiece*), but it would also have facilitated determining the necessary scale of altarpiece and painting.
  2. The Assumption of the Virgin was traditionally painted in a static manner, with the seated Virgin carried passively up to heaven, but Titian's standing Virgin almost seems to swirl upward. The powerful torsion of her body and her upraised

arms and upturned head draw her toward the extraordinary tilted airborne form of God, who caps the picture without stilling its motion. The triumphal arch of the frame is expansive even while it closes the composition.

3. The composition is almost created by color: The bright red costumes of the Madonna and two of the apostles mark the angles of an enormous pyramid. There are three tiers: the gesticulating apostles, the Madonna and angels, and God the Father, carefully interrelated by color and gesture. One is reminded of Raphael's *Disputà*, except that his work seems static in comparison with Titian's invention. It would be hard to imagine a more perfectly conceived tribute to the Frari's dedicatee—the *glorious* Saint Mary.
4. Indeed, this painting—the supreme masterpiece of the Venetian High Renaissance—is comparable in its ideal poise and dignity to Raphael's Vatican frescoes, and it even echoes some of the dramatic power of Michelangelo's Sistine figures. This is all the more remarkable because Titian had not yet been to Rome and could have known those works only through prints or drawings.

**VII.** When the *Assumption* was triumphantly unveiled on 19 May 1518, Titian had already been approached by Alphonso d'Este to contribute to the decoration of his Alabaster Chamber in Ferrara, for which Giovanni Bellini had so recently painted his *Feast of the Gods* (Lecture Thirty-One). Raphael and Fra Bartolommeo had been approached earlier, but Bartolommeo had died in September 1517 and Raphael had seemed in no hurry to commit to the project.

- A. Titian was probably asked to take over the subject for which Fra Bartolommeo had already sketched a composition, "The Worship of Venus," because he seems to have also taken over elements from the Florentine's design. When Raphael also died, Titian assumed the responsibility for three paintings, and they occupied him until late 1522 or early 1523. We will look at two: *Bacchus and Ariadne* and *The Andrians*.
- B. The last to be delivered was probably the *Bacchus and Ariadne*, but we will look at it first. It is a painting, like the other two, based on descriptions of now-lost ancient paintings by the Greek author

Philostratus the Elder (in his *Imagines*). Alphonso wanted these subjects recreated for his chamber.

1. The painting has a youthful charm, a certain combination of grace and willful awkwardness that suggests first love. The splendid color of the painting (the result of a strenuously debated restoration 40 years ago) harmonizes this love song.
  2. A teenage Bacchus leaps impetuously from a chariot drawn by cheetahs as Venus turns away in surprise. The train of attendants following Bacchus includes two wonderfully contrasting figures: a bearded satyr struggling to rid himself of a serpent (certainly inspired by the *Laocöon*, of which Titian would have seen copies) and an utterly charming child faun dragging a calf's head.
- C. *The Andrians* (probably the second to be finished) is one of the most memorably choreographed paintings of the Renaissance, and it had enormous influence on other painters, including Rubens, who copied it.
1. There is much drinking, much amorous behavior abetted by the drinking, and some sleep, induced by the drinking. The last category includes a sleeping old man on the hill at top right (perhaps a god of the place) and the robust nude at the lower right, who is based on the already famous classical image of the sleeping Ariadne.
  2. The visual poetry is stunning. Choose, if you can, from among the nude faun pouring wine into a *kylix* at the left center, the inebriated fellow balancing a crystal pitcher of wine aloft against the sky, or the dancing couple who only have eyes for each other.
- D. The paintings for the Alabaster Chamber begin a new phase in Titian's career, introducing him as among the greatest poets in paint of any era, with a complete command of all that painting can do to produce sheer seductive beauty for the eyes. The historically imposed limitations of this course mean that we must leave him with 50 years of painting to come, although we will glance at one or two of his later achievements in our summary.

## Works Discussed:

Titian:

*Young Man with Cap and Gloves*, c. 1512–1515, National Gallery, London.

*Gipsy Madonna*, c. 1510, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

*Saint Mark Enthroned with Saints*, c. 1511–1512, Santa Maria della Salute, Venice.

*Sacred and Profane Love*, c. 1514–1515, Galleria Borghese, Rome.

*La Virgen con el Niño, Santa Dorotea y San Jorge (The Madonna and Child with Saints Dorothy and George)*, c. 1515, Museo del Prado, Madrid.

*Assumption of the Virgin*, 1516–1518, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice.

*Bacchus and Ariadne*, c. 1522, National Gallery, London.

*The Andrians*, 1518–1525, Museo del Prado, Madrid.

## Essential Reading:

Adams, chapter 17.

Hartt, chapter 19.

## Supplementary Reading:

Pedrocco, Filippo. *Titian*. New York: Scala/Riverside, 1993.

Rosand, David. *Painting in Cinquecento Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.

## Questions to Consider:

1. What might be the connection of Titian's early *Saint Mark Enthroned with Four Saints* to an outbreak of the plague in Venice?
2. How would you describe the importance of Titian's *Assumption*, in the Church of the Frari, to the development of Venetian painting?

## Lecture Thirty-Five

### A Culture in Crisis

**Scope:** Because summation is even more difficult than introduction, we propose to begin this lecture by simply comparing several works of art to remind us of the distance we have traversed from the Early to the High Renaissance. In the history of art, both artists and students are (to borrow an analogy from Plutarch) like oarsmen, “who look astern while they row the boat ahead.” Then, with Michelangelo as the measure of the change that came over Italian art in the 1520s, we will enumerate the key political and religious events that strongly affected the cultural climate, not only in Italy but throughout Europe. When Michelangelo’s *Pietà* (1498–1499) in Saint Peter’s is compared with his *Tomb of Giuliano de’Medici* (c. 1526–1533), one quickly perceives that the unified, concentrated grief of the former has been displaced by an unfocused and profound malaise.

What had happened in the intervening years to account for this change? Powerful Italian city-states, including Florence, Rome (the Papal States), and Venice, often warred with one another, and the resultant instability invited military intervention. The pope also led an alliance that briefly deprived Venice of its mainland territories, and he encouraged the sale of indulgences (forgiveness of sins) to help raise money for the rebuilding of Saint Peter’s. This practice, continued by his successor, Leo X, was a huge step toward the Protestant Reformation. In the mid-1520s, the ill-considered machinations of Pope Clement VII precipitated an attack (1526) on Saint Peter’s and the Vatican by the Roman Colonna party, and Emperor Charles V seized this opportunity to invade the city. In May 1527, his unpaid mercenary troops commenced the horrifying seven-month sack of Rome, which essentially rendered the papal city desolate and nearly impotent for half a century.

Michelangelo next painted the immense altar wall of the Sistine Chapel with *The Last Judgment* (1535–1541). Nothing could be a greater contrast to his ceiling frescoes of 30 years before. The weight of the artist’s pessimism is felt in every detail, and the

whole, even after restoration revealed its brighter colors, is oppressive and terrifying. Painters of the subject usually stress damnation (it is an alluring pictorial subject), but Michelangelo paints salvation with equal cheerlessness.

It was not only in the art of Michelangelo that the psychological damage was evident. Paintings by Rosso Fiorentino (before the sack) and Pontormo (afterward) offer their own evidence that the High Renaissance had ended. In most artistic centers, it was replaced with mannerism, an inexact but usable style name. Mannerism asserted that justification could be found in ancient art for any style one wished to adopt or develop. For the mannerists, it was Hellenistic art with its expressive exaggerations and distortions. Mannerism became the dominant style until near the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

## Outline

- I. The last two lectures together are devoted to a retrospective glance at the territory covered in this course, a summary of the political, sociological, and theological events of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century that altered Italy and the rest of Europe and a sketch of the artistic developments that issued from that much-changed culture. We begin with a backward glance.
  - A. It is instructive and fascinating to compare Masaccio's *Trinity* (c. 1428) with Raphael's *School of Athens* (1510–1511).
    1. In the *Trinity*, Masaccio first established the principle of linear perspective as a means of creating the illusion of a consistent three-dimensional space on a flat surface. As we saw, he did not hesitate to take liberties with the system, to depart from it for practical or expressive reasons. The theological mystery of the Trinity is his subject.
    2. In the *School of Athens*, Raphael uses the same principle to create a much deeper and wider space, populated with a multitude of figures. His subject is more abstruse and general, concerned with philosophy as discussed by Renaissance humanists. Visually, one could imagine placing the *Trinity* fresco within the central arcade of the *School of Athens*. It is as if Raphael added wings to Masaccio's concept.

- B.** The altarpiece with Madonna and saints gathered in a single space (a *sacra conversazione*) was a significant innovation of Renaissance painting. The development is clear in the comparison of Domenico Veneziano's *Saint Lucy Altarpiece* (c. 1445) and Giovanni Bellini's *Saint Zaccaria Altarpiece* (1505).
1. Domenico's smaller-than-life-size figures are placed in a shallow space that does not disrupt the two-dimensional flow across the surface. The pastel hues and even the nuanced fall of light tend to unite the elements as surface pattern. The arcade, considered as surface design, also separates the figures into cells, at least to some degree.
  2. Bellini's life-size figures inhabit a space that is not merely larger but continuous. Its depth is created by greater contrasts of light and dark expressed through strong color, which simultaneously produces a feeling of an enveloping atmosphere. This compelling space also incorporates the real space and the real light of the altar and the church. Although Bellini's saints do not interact any more than do Domenico's, and make even less eye contact with the viewer, they carry much more conviction as real figures in a real space.
- C.** Now we will compare two works by Michelangelo, one that we have studied, the *Pietà* (1498–1499), and one that we have not, the *Tomb of Giuliano de' Medici* (c. 1526–1533).
1. The *Pietà* in Saint Peter's is, among other things, an expression of the ideal High Renaissance compositional design of a stable pyramid. The artist managed to establish this form despite the problem of positioning the large body of Christ on the lap of his mother. The sculpture also encapsulates deep grief in a restrained, even lyrical way.
  2. The *Tomb of Giuliano de' Medici*, part of the Medici Tombs in the so-called New Sacristy of San Lorenzo, also presents a pyramidal composition, albeit in different spatial planes. The duke's statue sits in a niche with the tomb below. The tomb is surmounted by two enormous allegorical statues, one of Night (the female nude) and one of Day (the male nude).
    - a. It is an unstable pyramid for several reasons: the two spatial planes, the uncertain poses of the allegories, and the curved sarcophagus from which the nudes appear

likely to slip. Instead of a broad architectonic base, we have a shifting foundation.

- b. The psychological expression of the nudes is also disquieting. Night is shown in a pose *not* conducive to sleep (and that would be remembered by Rodin when he designed *The Thinker*), and the body of Day is likewise twisted and emerging from sleep with difficulty and hesitancy.

**II.** The explanation for this profound stylistic and expressive shift is at once historically complex and fundamentally simple to perceive. From the 1490s to the 1520s, Italy had experienced a series of destabilizing events.

- A. Many of the city-states were often at war with one another, in a shifting series of alliances. Florence, the Papal States, Milan, Venice—all were involved in these debilitating actions. In addition to their respective military powers, they used what diplomatic weapons they had: bribery, promises of territory, dynastic marriages, excommunication (a pope could excommunicate whole cities, and did).
- B. These inter-peninsular struggles obviously invited foreign intervention, especially from France and the Holy Roman Empire. When Ludovico Sforza, duke of Milan, invited Charles VIII of France to invade Italy in 1494, to counterbalance the threat of Naples (under imperial control), it was a fateful turn in Italian Renaissance history. When the duke tried to expel the French, he could not and died in a French prison.
- C. The French also expelled the Medici from Florence in 1494 and remained until 1512, when the papal armies of Pope Julius II drove them from Italy (and returned the Medici from exile). Julius II also fought to regain territory for the Papal States, mainly at the expense of Venice, achieving this briefly through the League of Cambrai.
- D. At the same time, in his zeal to rebuild Saint Peter's from the ground up, the pope raised money through the sale of indulgences (forgiveness of sins), a practice that continued under his successor, the Medici Pope Leo X. It led more or less directly to Martin Luther's famous 95 Theses, posted in Wittenberg in 1517. This and the 1521 excommunication of Luther at the Diet of Worms



were foundation stones in the Protestant Reformation that shook the Roman Church.

- E. At this point, another Medici, Clement VII, came to the throne. A weak pope who failed to grasp the threat of the Reformation, he lost the English Church by mishandling Henry VIII's annulment, allied himself with the French, and argued with the emperor. These actions precipitated an unprecedented attack on the Vatican by a cabal of Roman nobles around the ancient Colonna family and gave Emperor Charles V the opportunity to invade Rome.
- F. What followed was, in a sense, a matter of chance. The emperor's mercenary troops—some 20,000 Germans, Spaniards, and Italian irregulars—went unpaid and turned on the city. The sack of Rome in 1527 was horrific. Massacres and physical destruction left the city desolate. Much art was destroyed, as well. The city nearly ceased to be habitable, and the pre-sack population of some 100,000 dwindled. It was more than half a century before the city, during the papacy of Sixtus V, began to recover and rebuild.

III. We continue with a look ahead. To fully comprehend the sea change that came over art following the sack of Rome we need only to look at the next great creation of Michelangelo—the *Last Judgment* (1535–1541), frescoed on the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel. We shall look at it in direct contrast to the ceiling of three decades before.

- A. The Sistine ceiling (1508–1512), for all of its variety and the changes that occurred during its creation, is a measured, unified, harmonious, and *humane* composition. It is an expression of the High Renaissance in its confidence, optimism, and heroic expression of both the human and the divine.
- B. The *Last Judgment* is an oppressive juggernaut—a very great juggernaut. But even since superb conservation has restored it, like the ceiling, to a startling palette that few suspected, its huge forms, relentless rhythms, and oppressive weight appall the viewer. Its greatness is not in question, but the achievement is of a sort diametrically opposed to the Sistine ceiling.
  - 1. The forms and their expressive content are those of despair, pessimism, and the near certainty of damnation. Michelangelo's vocabulary is still that of the human body, but his *Last Judgment* suggests that it will be a titanic struggle for

anyone to get into heaven. This is the unleavened pessimism of Jeremiah, magnified a hundredfold.

2. Compare two figures only: Adam from the *Creation of Adam* and the enormous figure, with one eye staring in stark horror while the other is covered with his hand as demons drag him down to hell. Compare them: the utter innocence—blankness—of the yet-to-be-fully-created Adam and the haunted expression of one who knows his awful fate. One artist imagined and painted both these men, but an artist who, one feels, had lost hope in redemption in the interim.
3. That artist may be seen in the central portion of this terrifying fresco, in the figure of Saint Bartholomew just below and to the right of Christ. This saint was martyred by being flayed alive. In Christian neo-Platonic thought, the sloughing off of the human skin was a release of the soul from the corporeal prison. Here, Bartholomew holds the knife of his martyrdom in his right hand and his skin in his left. The face on the skin is the face of Michelangelo.

IV. But it was not only Michelangelo who made visible the profound trauma of the period. In most of the artistic centers of Italy, a new style arose that radically replaced that of Renaissance humanism. It is, in English, called *mannerism*, a title that seems appropriate but is nonetheless misleading. Appropriate because the style features distortions of drawing, space, and color that are the antithesis of the norms of the Renaissance—thus, the English word *mannered* seems to fit—but misleading because its derivation is quite different.

- A. Mannerism derives from the Italian *maniera*, which is shorthand for *maniera della antiqua*—“manner of the antique.” That is to say, that the artists who practiced and codified mannerism found their sources and their justification in ancient art, in their case, the art of late Hellenistic Greece (c. 100 B.C.–c. 100 A.D.). That style was dynamic, expressive, frequently departing from the norms of proportion and composition known in the classical period of Greek art of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. In other words, one could (and can) find a model and justification for almost any style in the long history of ancient Greek art.
- B. Mannerism had already emerged by the time Raphael died. His pupils and, it seems, Raphael himself had already begun to subvert

the principles of the Renaissance in the designs for the last *stanze* in the Vatican. The new anti-classical style was essentially in place before the 1527 sack of Rome, a response to the massive social disorder.

- C. Among the leading practitioners of the first phase of mannerism was Rosso Fiorentino (1495–1540), a Florentine (as his name attests) who visited Rome to see the Sistine ceiling for himself and borrowed many of its figurative inventions. His art immediately makes apparent the other aspect of mannerism, its extraordinary content. Extreme emotion and violent action, psychological expressions of neurosis or psychosis that seem strikingly modern in the post-Freud era, are all to be found somewhere in mannerist art, and Rosso's great *Descent from the Cross* (1521) in Volterra is one of the most remarkable. Spidery, angular, anguished, with a great void at its center, it is deeply moving but utterly anti-humanistic.
- D. In the immediate post-sack period, Jacopo Pontormo (1494–1557), the exact contemporary of Rosso, finished an *Entombment* (1528; in Santa Felicità, in Florence just across the Ponte Vecchio) that equals Rosso's masterpiece but in an utterly different vocabulary. Weightless, balloon-like figures somehow support Christ while walking or crouching on tip-toes. The painting seems about to dissolve in puffs of pink-white smoke. It is not even clear whether it is an entombment or a deposition, because neither tomb nor cross is evident.
- E. In the next and final lecture, we will conclude the course with a look at the changed art of post-sack northern Italy, specifically in Parma and Venice. As had been the case during the Quattrocento and early Cinquecento, the artistic situation there developed in strikingly idiosyncratic ways.

### **Works Discussed:**

Giovanni Bellini:

*San Zaccaria Altarpiece*, 1505, San Zaccaria, Venice.

Rosso Fiorentino:

*Deposition (The Descent from the Cross)*, 1521, Pinacoteca, Volterra.

Masaccio:

*The Trinity*, c. 1428, Santa Maria Novella, Florence,

Michelangelo:

*Pietà*, 1498–1499, Saint Peter's, Rome.

*Tomb of Giuliano de' Medici*, 1526–1533, San Lorenzo, Florence.

Sistine ceiling and detail *Creation of Adam*, 1508–1512, Sistine Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican State.

*The Last Judgment*, 1535–1541, Sistine Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican State.

Jacopo Pontormo:

*Entombment*, 1528, Capponi Chapel, Santa Felicità, Florence.

Raphael:

*The School of Athens*, *Stanza della Segnatura*, 1510–1511, Vatican Palace, Vatican State.

Domenico Veneziano:

*Saint Lucy Altarpiece*, c. 1445, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

### **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapter 18.

Hartt, chapters 18, 20.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Chastel, André. *The Sack of Rome, 1527*. Trans. by Beth Archer. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

Franklin, David. *Painting in Renaissance Florence, 1500–1550*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

Partridge, Loren, et al. *Michelangelo: The Last Judgment, A Glorious Restoration*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. What were the major sociopolitical crises of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and what was their effect on the Renaissance?
2. Contrast Michelangelo's Sistine ceiling and his *Last Judgment* in the same chapel, and explain that contrast.

## Lecture Thirty-Six

### The Renaissance Reformed

**Scope:** In the northern city of Parma, some remarkable artists appeared in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. Parmigianino (1503–1540) painted several works in the mannerist style, none more striking than the *Madonna of the Long Neck*. He was influenced by Correggio (1494–1534), whose innovative art included remarkable illusionistic dome paintings. His influence on Baroque illusionism was immense.

Venice, however, presents a different circumstance. Because the Renaissance arrived late there and because its political institutions and its independence remained intact throughout the entire period, it proved less susceptible to the turmoil of the century and artistically more able to continue the expansive, optimistic, lyrical style that had marked it thus far. Titian, in particular, seemed to answer to no impulse but his own, and his opulent chromatic painting developed according to its own law. A moving religious artist, a great portraitist, he is also, as we have already seen, a dazzling painter of mythological paintings. One famous example is the *Rape of Europa*, a sensual work of his old age. Paolo Veronese (c. 1528–1588) was his closest successor, but his greatest genius was for large decorative paintings, such as the *Wedding at Cana*. Of the great trio of Venetians of the later 16<sup>th</sup> century, only Tintoretto (1518–1594) showed the influence of central Italian mannerism to any degree, and he often used it to attain intense mystical expressiveness.

The religious schism and tensions generated by the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation were vividly reflected in the contrasting artistic styles of the years between 1520 and the end of the century. A long glance back at the Renaissance achievement helps illuminate the artistic situation toward 1600. Thus, a final look at three masterpieces, three vastly different interpretations of the same subject, the Last Supper, measures once again the ground traversed. Castagno's version of 1447, Leonardo's of about 1498, and Tintoretto's startling vision of about 1594. With Tintoretto's *Last Supper*, the humanism of the

Renaissance, whether calm or impassioned, has been replaced with an urgent, mystical vision.

## Outline

- I. Parma was absorbed briefly into the Papal States from 1512–1515, then again from 1521–1545, and this led to a brief but important cultural revival.
  - A. The mannerist style, which we saw in the last lecture in paintings by Rosso Fiorentino and Pontormo, was also strongly manifest in Parmigianino, the nickname of Francesco Mazzola (1503–1540). This short-lived artist had gone to Rome when he was 20, absorbed the lessons of the Sistine ceiling and of antiquity, when he was unfortunately captured during the sack of Rome. He escaped and, by 1530, had returned to Parma.
    1. His *Madonna of the Long Neck* (c. 1536–1540) is perhaps the most famous of his extraordinarily distorted but elegant inventions. The elongations (not only of the neck!) in these bodies is matched for artifice by the utter collapse of logical space.
    2. There was also a religious literary conceit at play here. In some medieval hymns to the Virgin, her neck is compared to a white column (it may derive from the Song of Solomon—“Thy neck is as a tower of ivory”), and this in turn, is apposite to the idea that the Virgin stands for the Church. By the way, it is worth noting that echoes of the *Laocöon*, which Parmigianino had copied, are detectable in this utterly unrelated subject.
  - B. Before his Roman sojourn, Parmigianino had worked on frescoes in the recently built Church of San Giovanni Evangelista, where his older contemporary Correggio (Antonio Allegri, 1494–1534) was frescoing the cupola with *The Vision of Saint John* (1520–1524).
    1. Correggio’s emergence as a great painter has never been adequately explained, because he did not come from the studio of a noted artist or from a major artistic center, but for this particular work, his departure point was Mantegna’s illusionistic oculus in the *Camera degli Sposi* in nearby Mantua (1471–1474; Lecture Twenty-Six).

2. Mantegna's illusionism depended on the apparent opening in the architecture of the ceiling and the view of the sky. He then deployed his figures around the circumference of the oculus in various witty poses, strongly foreshortened, to further startle and delight the viewer.
3. Correggio relied less on architecture and more on figures. Apostles and angels seated on clouds form the concentric circles that seem to rise into space where, rapidly ascending in the center of the cupola, Christ is seen in a radically foreshortened position. The evangelist of the title is crouched almost unseen at the rim of the cupola with his eagle, looking up in astonishment. This remarkable fresco, and that in the dome of the cathedral that immediately followed, were the inspiration for many of the great dome frescoes of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

II. A different artistic situation pertained in Venice. First, the Renaissance had arrived late in Venice. Second, the republic was an unusually stable institution amid the turbulent shifts of power that characterized the rest of Italy. Third, its political independence translated into a remarkable degree of artistic independence in which outside trends, whether abrupt or gradual, were assimilated more gradually. Titian, especially, continued in the optimistic, lyrical, and expansive vein of his earlier work.

A. This does not mean that Titian was unaffected by the work of artists outside of Venice. Michelangelo, for instance, had a notable impact on him, but even before that, he showed interest in the asymmetrical and centrifugal compositions that became more common after 1520.

1. His *Madonna of the Pesaro Family* (1519–1526) followed his own impossible achievement for the same church, the Frari. Set in a prominent location in the north aisle, the large painting contrasted in several ways with the *Assumption* in the apse. It is asymmetrical, with the Madonna and Child enthroned at the right side at the top of a rising diagonal, while Saint Peter dominates the middle of the canvas.
  - a. The reason for the displacement of the Madonna is found in the group at the right. In 1502, Jacopo Pesaro had defeated the Turks at the Battle of Santa Maura. Here, Jacopo kneels in the left foreground, with a Moorish

prisoner behind him, and his victory offering, as it were, is presented to Saint Peter, who represents the Church. Peter, whose keys are on the step below him, is associated with a soaring column behind him and the Madonna and Child, with another.

- b. The remarkable thing about the columns is that they soar out of the confines of the picture, swelling the effect of space. This dynamic and open-ended composition, invented by Titian, was much-used by Venetian High Renaissance painters and became an essential element in Baroque art of the next century.
2. When he was almost 75, Titian painted one of the most sensual, sumptuous, coloristically triumphant paintings of any era, *The Rape of Europa* (1562). Painted for Philip II of Spain, it eventually found its way to the Boston collection of Isabella Stewart Gardner.
  - a. According to Ovid (*Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*), Jupiter desired Europa, daughter of the king of Tyre; taking the form of a white bull, he joined her and her attendants by the seashore. Captivated by the bull's docile nature, Europa climbed on its back and was thereupon taken out to sea.
  - b. Titian revels in the richly erotic story, treating it as a light-hearted fantasy. Nearly 7 feet wide, it is composed on a long, low diagonal from the cupid on a dolphin's back at lower left to the head of the bull-Jupiter turning toward us at the right edge. They seem about to exit the scene. Titian painted it with an astounding technique and command of color that are indescribable and breathtaking.
- B. Paolo Veronese (c. 1528–1588) is Titian's closest stylistic counterpart who, though 40 years younger, worked in the older master's shadow for much of his career. Veronese was a great decorative painter, creating elegant illusionistic scenes on the walls of villas on the Venetian mainland and vast canvases for the huge refectory walls of Venetian churches.
  1. For the monks' refectory in the monastery of the Palladian Church of San Giorgio Maggiore, he created a joyful masterpiece, *The Wedding at Cana* (1562–1568).



- a. The painting has plenty of serious religious significance, but it is impossible to ignore the theatrical sweep of the scene, its color and activity. At the lower center is a quartet of musicians, artists all, for he has painted Titian on the bass, Jacopo Bassano on the flute, Tintoretto on violin, and himself, in white, on the viola.
  - b. The Benedictine monks must have thoroughly enjoyed meals in the refectory at San Giorgio. But not everyone approved of the liberties that Veronese took with such subjects. In the refectory of Ss. Giovanni e Paolo, he painted a *Last Supper*, much more sober, that contained extraneous figures; this bothered Counter-Reformation Church authorities.
  - c. The Inquisition, given new papal authority in 1542, had the job of investigating departures from doctrine, including in art. In 1573, Veronese was called to account for his unscriptural additions, and in brief, he said that the painting “is large and, it seemed to me, it could hold many figures.” Ordered to make changes, he made one: He changed the title from the *Last Supper* to the *Feast in the House of Levi*.
2. Veronese’s *summa*, the painting which was surely his most prestigious commission, is *The Apotheosis of Venice* (1583), a 30-foot oil painting mounted on the ceiling of the Great Council Hall of the Doge’s Palace.
  - a. In one important respect, it is a perfect product of the Venetian High Renaissance as exemplified by Titian’s *Assumption* 65 years before: It is symmetrical and enclosed, and its serene nobility is not all that far removed from either Titian or Raphael.
  - b. But there is something we have not seen, although it had already been introduced elsewhere by Titian. The illusionism is strong, creating a vision of reality above us. But it is unlike Correggio’s cupola in Parma with its extreme foreshortening. It is a compromise illusionism that works perfectly from only one viewpoint on the floor, which corresponds to the approximately 45-degree angle of vision painted into the picture. It was the favored Venetian illusionistic treatment of ceilings, and in the

Baroque, it would become the preferred alternative to Correggio's more extreme drama.

- C. Of the great trio of Venetian painters in the second half of the century, only Jacopo Tintoretto (1518–1594) fully embraced the stylistic language of mannerism. He used it brilliantly in the service of violent emotional drama and mystical expression.
1. A famous example is *Carrying the Body of Saint Mark* (1562–1565), one of the paintings (formerly in the Scuola di San Marco) depicting the crucial moments in the recovery and return of Mark's body, a drama that had already been the founding myth of Venice for seven centuries.
  2. Once more, asymmetry is at the heart of the design, and spatial manipulation at the emotional core. It is a wind tunnel of space, seemingly created by the storm that God has sent to enable the "liberation" of the (fully preserved) body of Mark. The Venetian merchants display the body even as it is removed, while all the Alexandrians in the courtyard flee into the arcade as if they were sucked into it.

III. We have seen the radical changes in Italian art of the last three-quarters of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. To a large degree, they reflected the schism of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation and the tremendous tensions of that epochal struggle. Students of art, no less than artists, are in the position of Plutarch's oarsmen: We are looking backward while rowing forward. The distance traversed is clear enough in a reprise of two masterpieces and the introduction of a third, all paintings of the same subject, each markedly different from the other. The subject is the Last Supper.

- A. In 1447, Andrea del Castagno painted his *Last Supper* on the wall of the refectory of the convent of Sant'Apollonia in Florence (Lecture Eight). His startling achievement was to open the wall into another room, a convincing box of space, at the back of which sat Christ and the apostles at a long table, Judas isolated on the near side. Expressively, he hit upon the wonderful device of the dramatically veined marble slab that formed the backdrop for Jesus, Peter, and Judas. The fictive space and architecture are the true protagonists of the fresco. The overall effect is static and solemn.

- B. Half a century later, Leonardo da Vinci re-imagined the sacred event and its setting in the refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan (Lecture Nineteen). His apostles became dramatic actors of a kind not seen before in this sacramental subject. All, including Judas, were integrated into the drama, which was staged in a room both deep and shallow, established by a perspective scheme that simultaneously collapsed it and thrust the figures at the viewer. The overall effect is of surging drama held in check by the serene transforming center, Christ as celebrant and subject of the Mass.
- C. At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the end of his life, Tintoretto painted a *Last Supper* (1592–1594) destined not for a refectory but the presbytery of San Giorgio Maggiore, where it is still in situ to the right of the high altar. The subject was central to the church's dedication to the doctrine of transubstantiation.
1. The event takes place in a dark and dimly seen room, lit by the spiritual light that seeps into the room from a hanging lamp, from cloud-like angels, and in the center, emanating from Christ himself.
  2. The table, in a literally revolutionary change, thrusts back into the space. It is no longer the altar table of the Mass but, like the agitated apostles, a full participant in the mystical event. We saw this violent rush into space in Tintoretto's *The Carrying of the Body of Saint Mark*, but here, it is also a considered part of its placement. The church has a double-sided altar, with the back altar facing the monks' choir. It is only there, among the monks daily celebrating Mass, that the perspective plunge of Tintoretto's *Last Supper* makes visual and spiritual sense.
  3. The institution of the Mass is, thus, directed principally at the monastic audience. In this respect, it is important to notice that Christ is, in fact, the celebrant of the Mass, giving communion to an apostle. Among the agitated apostles at the near end of the table, one can find a direct quotation from Leonardo's *Last Supper*, but the emotion is not in response to the revelation of imminent betrayal; rather, it is to the mystical event of transubstantiation. To make the theological ritual (rather than narrative climax) the engine of high drama is an interpretation of the Last Supper unimaginable before the needs and dictates of the Counter-Reformation appeared on the historical scene.

## **Works Discussed:**

Andrea del Castagno:

*The Last Supper*, 1447, Convent of Sant'Apollonia, Florence.

Correggio:

*The Vision of Saint John*, 1520–1524, Church of San Giovanni Evangelista, Parma.

Leonardo da Vinci:

*The Last Supper*, c. 1495–1498, Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan.

Parmigianino:

*Madonna of the Long Neck*, c. 1536–1540, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

Tintoretto:

*The Carrying of the Body of Saint Mark*, c. 1562–1565, Accademia, Venice.

*The Last Supper*, 1592–1594, Church of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice.

Titian:

*Madonna of the Pesaro Family*, 1519–1526, Church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice.

*Rape of Europa*, 1562, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Veronese:

*The Wedding at Cana*, c. 1562–1568, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

*The Apotheosis of Venice*, 1583, Doge's Palace, Venice.

## **Essential Reading:**

Adams, chapters 17–18.

Hartt, chapters 18–19.

## **Supplementary Reading:**

Rosand, David. *Painting in Cinquecento Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.

## **Questions to Consider:**

1. Can you list some of the stylistic characteristics of mannerism and some of the artists who practiced it? What is the derivation of the term?

2. We have concluded the course with a comparison of three versions of *The Last Supper* painted between 1447 and 1594. Many other comparisons could have been made. Can you suggest comparisons of several versions of other subjects painted or sculpted during the Quattrocento and Cinquecento that would also be instructive?

## Timeline

313 A.D.	Roman Emperor Constantine issues the Edict of Milan, granting official freedom of worship to Christians.
c. 337	The construction of Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome is complete.
476	Western Roman Empire falls to the Goths, leaving a power vacuum in Italy and throughout Europe that was filled partially by the Roman Catholic Church.
800	Charlemagne crowned first Holy Roman Emperor, creating the appearance of a united Western Europe, with the pope as the spiritual leader and the emperor as the temporal leader.
829	According to Venetian legend, the relics of Saint Mark the Evangelist are brought from Alexandria to Venice, bestowing great religious significance on the young city, whose main patron saint he becomes, replacing Saint Theodore.
1204	Crusaders and Venetians sack Constantinople, carrying off many artistic treasures to Venice.
1206	Saint Dominic founds the Dominican Order.
1209	Saint Francis founds the Franciscan Order.
1299–1310	The Palazzo Vecchio, city hall of Florence, is constructed.

1305 .....	Giotto frescoes the Scrovegni (Arena) Chapel in Padua with scenes from the life of the Virgin and the life of Christ, a cycle that becomes a touchstone for later artists, particularly in the Renaissance.
1309–1378 .....	Papacy moves from Rome to Avignon.
1310–1340 .....	Original construction of the Doge's Palace, Venice; fires resulted in several later reconstructions, culminating in the rebuilding in the 1580s.
1321 .....	Dante completes his <i>Divine Comedy</i> , a landmark in the Italian language and world literature.
1348 .....	The Black Death devastates Florence and Siena, and the material and spiritual trauma that ensues radically changes the course of art.
1353 .....	Boccaccio publishes the <i>Decameron</i> , a collection of 100 tales “told” by men and women in a rural retreat to avoid the plague.
1354–1357 .....	Orcagna paints the Strozzi Altarpiece, a stylistic regression to the hieratic Byzantine style, reflecting the traumatic effect of the plague on the spiritual tenor of the age.
c. 1400 .....	Rise of the International Gothic, a late medieval style, which flourishes for several decades, even while the new forms of the Renaissance develop.
1401 .....	Competition for the North Doors of the Florentine Baptistery won by Ghiberti whose doors, finished in 1424, led to

the commission for a second set of doors.

- c. 1415 ..... Donatello completes his heroic marble sculpture of *Saint George* for an exterior niche on Orsanmichele, the Florentine guildhall and church. His conception of the heroic warrior typifies the new Renaissance humanism.
- 1420–1436 ..... Construction of the dome of the Florence Cathedral, designed by Brunelleschi, whose fame was as much for the engineering feat as for the architectural beauty.
- 1424–1427 ..... Fresco cycle of the Brancacci Chapel begun by Masolino and continued by Masaccio, whose achievement was the first great landmark of Italian Renaissance painting.
- 1428 ..... Masaccio paints the fresco of *The Trinity* in Santa Maria Novella in Florence, a work in which linear, or one-point, perspective is for the first time the governing principle. It is assumed that he learned the method from the architect Brunelleschi.
- 1425–1452 ..... Lorenzo Ghiberti designs and completes the *Gates of Paradise*, his second set of doors for the Baptistry.
- 1434 ..... Cosimo de' Medici returns from exile to become de facto ruler of the nominal republic of Florence. His rule was generally benevolent and progressive, and the Medici remained in control for 60 years.
- 1435 ..... Leon Battista Alberti publishes *On Painting*, a treatise that includes the



	first description of the method of linear perspective.
c. 1443–1450 .....	Donatello creates the <i>Gattamelata</i> in Padua, the first life-size bronze equestrian monument since antiquity.
1453 .....	Fall of Constantinople to the Turks.
c. 1453–1454 .....	Piero della Francesca paints the fresco cycle of <i>The Legend of the True Cross</i> in the Church of San Francesco at Arezzo.
1465–1474 .....	Mantegna paints the <i>Camera Picta</i> in the Gonzaga ducal palace in Mantova.
c. 1466 .....	Construction begun on the new ducal palace at Urbino, designed by Luciano Laurana.
1469 .....	Lorenzo de' Medici, called "the Magnificent," grandson of Cosimo, becomes ruler of Florence and one of the greatest cultural patrons of the Renaissance. He dies in 1472.
1475–1476 .....	Antonello da Messina documented as working in Venice.
1475 .....	Hugo van der Goes paints the <i>Portinari Altarpiece</i> for a Florentine church, and the novelty of its Flemish realism alters Florentine art.
1478 .....	The Pazzi conspiracy (in which Pope Sixtus IV was complicit) results in the assassination of Giuliano de' Medici in the Duomo; Lorenzo de' Medici escapes; members of the Pazzi family are executed.
1478–1482 .....	Botticelli paints for a Medici patron the beautiful and mysterious <i>Primavera</i>

(“*Spring*”), which apparently reflects the elaborate neo-Platonic philosophy then popular among Renaissance humanists.

- 1481–1482 ..... Fresco decoration of the walls of the new Sistine Chapel, ordered by Sixtus IV, introduces the Florentine Renaissance style into Rome. Works by Perugino, Botticelli, and Signorelli are included in the decorations.
- 1492 ..... Voyage of Columbus to the New World.
- 1494 ..... Invasion of Italy by Charles VIII of France, at the invitation of the duke of Milan, results in the subjugation of Florence and the exile of the Medici.
- 1495–1498 ..... Leonardo da Vinci paints *The Last Supper*, the exemplar of the High Renaissance style, for the refectory of the ducal church of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan. Deteriorating practically from the day it was finished, it nonetheless revolutionized the history of art.
- 1497 ..... The Dominican friar Savonarola, who had preached against the perceived sins of the Medici and of Florentine society generally, is excommunicated and, the following year, is burned at the stake in Florence.
- 1503–1504 ..... Leonardo and Michelangelo commissioned to paint two huge paintings for the new council hall of the Palazzo Vecchio. Neither work was ever completely finished, and though

both are lost, they were among the most influential designs of the period.

- 1505 ..... Giovanni Bellini paints his serene masterpiece of the Venetian High Renaissance style, the *San Zaccaria Altarpiece*.
- 1506 ..... The discovery in Rome of the Hellenistic sculpture *Laocoön*, a famous sculpture of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., provided a dramatic source for Michelangelo and other Renaissance artists.
- 1506–1514 ..... On the request of Pope Julius II, Bramante designs the plan for a new basilica of Saint Peter's, to replace the thousand-year-old Constantinian church.
- 1508 ..... The League of Cambrai, under control of Pope Julius II, temporarily relieves Venice of its mainland territories.
- 1508–1511 ..... Michelangelo, with assistants, paints the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel which, along with Raphael's Vatican *Stanzae*, forms the apogee of High Renaissance painting in Rome.
- 1510–1514 ..... Raphael paints the *Stanzae*, the rooms of the papal apartments in the Vatican.
- 1512 ..... Julius II expels the French from Italy and restores the Medici to power in Florence.
- c. 1515–1516 ..... Michelangelo carves the figure of *Moses* for the tomb of Julius II, the largest sculpture commission of his career but destined to dwindle to a shadow of the original design.

1517 .....	Martin Luther posts his 95 Theses in Wittenberg, beginning the Reformation.
c. 1517–1520 .....	A new style, mannerism, begins to develop within the matrix of the High Renaissance. It can be seen in the last works of Raphael in the Vatican, in the stylistic changes of Michelangelo's art, and in the work of younger artists. Confirmed by the political and religious crises of the 1520s, it becomes the principal style of central Italian art by the 1530s.
1518 .....	Titian's <i>Assumption</i> unveiled in the Church of the Frari, Venice.
1519–1534 .....	Michelangelo designs and executes the sculpture and architecture for the Medici Chapel in San Lorenzo, Florence.
1521 .....	Martin Luther excommunicated at the Diet of Worms.
1527 .....	Sack of Rome by the mercenary troops of Emperor Charles V devastates the city, leaving it depopulated and powerless for 50 years. This event signals closing of the Renaissance era.
1535–1541 .....	Michelangelo frescoes the huge altar wall of the Sistine Chapel with a <i>Last Judgment</i> .
1545–1563 .....	The theological Council of Trent meets intermittently in response to the Protestant Reformation. In this Counter-Reformation, abuses are corrected and doctrine is clarified. The tribunal of the Inquisition (extant since 1233 to suppress heresy) becomes the

enforcement arm of the Roman Catholic Church in this struggle.

- 1550 ..... Giorgio Vasari publishes the first edition of *The Lives of the Artists*, the earliest encyclopedic biographical-historical account of Italian art and artists from Giotto to Vasari's own day.
- 1564 ..... With the death of Michelangelo, the long period of central Italian artistic dominance comes to an end, and with Tintoretto's death in 1594, the great age of Venetian art similarly concludes.

## Glossary

**Note:** Many of these terms are Italian in origin, though widely used today in English.

**aerial perspective:** The effect of deep space in a landscape painting, created by diminution of scale and softened contour line and by giving a bluish-green tint to the distant hills and other objects. This technique gave an equivalent of the optical effect perceived by our eyes when looking at the landscape, which results from water and dust particles suspended in the atmosphere. Also called *atmospheric perspective*.

**apse:** Semicircular or polygonal recess at the end of the long axis (nave) or a chapel or the choir of a Christian church.

**basilica:** Any church that has a longitudinal nave, flanked by side aisles, terminating in an apse. Originally an ancient Roman public building with the same ground plan.

**campanile** (Italian): The bell tower of a church.

**cantoria** (Italian): Choir gallery or balcony.

**cartoon:** Full-size preparatory drawing from which a design is transferred to a surface for painting. From the Italian *cartone* (“cardboard”).

**cathedral:** A church where a bishop has his diocese and official seat (from *cathedra*, “throne”).

**chancel:** The part of the church reserved for the clergy, most often at the east end of the nave, beyond the crossing (transept).

**chiaroscuro** (Italian): “Light-dark,” refers to the dramatic or theatrical contrast of light and dark in painting.

**cinquecento** (Italian): “Five hundred,” short for *mille cinquecento*, or one thousand, five hundred, and refers to the 1500s, what is called in English the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

**condottiere** (Italian): Mercenary general.

**contrapposto** (Italian): “Set against,” refers to the method of introducing movement into the human body in sculpture or painting by placing the weight principally on one leg with the other leg relaxed, which causes the body to assume an asymmetrical posture with a modified S-curve.

**diptych:** Religious image consisting of two equal paintings, usually on panel, often hinged to be opened and closed.

**Doge** (Venetian or Genoese dialect): “Duke,” signifying the head of state.

**donor:** The person who commissioned a work of art and whose portrait, along with portraits of other family members, may sometimes be included in the composition.

**duomo** (Italian): Cathedral.

**Eucharist:** The sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, celebrated in the Mass. Also the bread and wine used in the rite.

**dresco** (Italian): Literally, “fresh.” The technique of painting in wet plaster on a wall. If the color becomes part of the plaster wall, it is “true fresco” (*buon fresco*). If it is painted onto the dry surface, it is “dry fresco” (*fresco a secco*). The latter technique is used with expensive pigments or for finishing details.

**linear perspective:** The system of creating the illusion of three-dimensional space on a flat surface that was first known in ancient Rome and was re-developed in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century in Florence. The architect Filippo Brunelleschi is generally credited with the invention.

**Mass:** The celebration of the Eucharist, in reference to the sacrifice of Christ. The central rite of the Christian liturgy.

**nave:** Central aisle of a (basilican) church, extending from the entrance to the chancel.

**Neo-Platonism:** A system that attempted to reconcile the ancient philosophy of Plato and Plotinus with the teachings of Christianity. Developed in Alexandria and other Greek centers in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. and revived in the Italian Renaissance.

**oil:** Describes the medium in which pigments are suspended in a drying medium, such as linseed or walnut oil. Because they are not rapid drying (as tempera), they can be applied freely over a wide area, and because they are translucent rather than opaque, they create effects of depth and luminosity. When dry, they are solid films. The Renaissance development of the oil medium can be traced to the Netherlands in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, and it became the dominant medium from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward.

**orthogonals:** Diagonal lines drawn or painted on a two-dimensional surface that illusionistically extend into space, appearing to converge at a single point (the vanishing point) and giving the effect of a measurable three-dimensional space in linear perspective. Also used in relief sculpture.

**perspective:** See **linear perspective** and **aerial perspective**.

**pietà** (Italian): “Pity.” The name given to a representation of the dead Christ supported by the Virgin Mary, sometimes with angels or saints.

**polyptych:** An altarpiece or other devotional picture or relief sculpture, made up of multiple panels. Typically a central panel flanked by wings and surmounted by gables or other forms and sometimes placed on a base (*predella*).

**predella** (Italian): The base or pedestal of a large altarpiece, often decorated with small paintings relating to the figures above.

**putto** (pl. *putti*; Italian): Small nude boys, sometimes winged, seen in both religious and secular Renaissance painting and sculpture.

**quatrefoil** (French): A decorative shape similar to a four-leaf clover combined with a diamond, common in Gothic art as a field for relief sculpture or painting.

**quattrocento** (Italian): Literally “four hundred,” short for *mille quattrocento*, or one thousand, four hundred, and referring to the 1400s, what is called the 15<sup>th</sup> century in English.

**refectory:** Dining hall in a convent or monastery.

**rilievo schiacciato** (Italian): Flattened or very low relief sculpture.

**sacra conversazione** (Italian): Literally, a “sacred conversation.” A group of saints that accompanies the Madonna and Child (or, occasionally, a central saint) in a painted or sculptured altarpiece, all of whom appear to occupy the same illusionistic space, in which they might “converse” or interact with one another.

**scuola** (pl. *scuole*; Italian): “School.” In art history, the term specifically refers to a company or confraternity of Venetian citizens with a religious affiliation. Organized for charitable purposes, they were also important patrons of art. In other cities, they were simply called companies or confraternities.



***sfumato*** (Italian): Literally, “smoky.” The method of painting subtle gradations of light and dark, especially in modeling the human figure, developed by Leonardo da Vinci.

**tempera**: Water-based painting medium in which ground colors are usually suspended in egg yolk. The principal medium before the *Cinquecento*, it is characterized by a gleaming surface, decorative flatness, and durability. Often used in conjunction with oil paints.

***tondo*** (Italian): A circular painting or relief, referred to as a *roundel* in English.

**transept**: The short axis, or cross arm, of a basilican church. It intersects the nave just before the chancel. The ground plan of such a church is cross-shaped.

***trecento*** (Italian): Literally, “three hundred,” short for *mille trecento*, or one thousand, three hundred, and referring to the 1300s, what is called the 14<sup>th</sup> century in English.

**triptych**: An altarpiece or other devotional image made up of three painted or carved panels. The wings usually are smaller than the center panel and are sometimes are hinged for closing.

**tympanum**: Either the triangular space created by the intersection of a vault with a wall or a similar pointed or semicircular arched shape above a window. It may be decorated with sculpture or painting.

## Biographical Notes

**Alberti, Leon Battista** (1404–1472). Important Florentine architect and theorist whose lasting fame derives from his book *On Painting*, in which the principles of perspective were articulated for the first time, and from his *Ten Books on Architecture*, the first publication on the subject since Roman times.

**Alighieri, Dante** (1265–1321). Dante is the author of the *Divine Comedy*, one of the enduring masterpieces of world literature. This long theological poem, written in the vernacular rather than Latin, was the most influential work in establishing Italian as the written language of Italy. A Florentine, he spent most of his life as a political exile.

**Angelico, Fra (Giovanni da Fiesole)**(c. 1400–1455). Florentine painter whose career was mostly spent in the service of the Dominican Order, especially in the decoration of the Convent of San Marco.

**Bellini, Gentile** (c. 1429–1507). A major Venetian artist who painted narrative cycles and other large paintings in which contemporary Venice was vividly rendered. He also redecorated the Doge's Palace in 1474 (destroyed by fire in 1577). Painted for the sultan in Constantinople, where he traveled with a diplomatic mission in 1479–1481. Older brother of Giovanni Bellini, see below.

**Bellini, Giovanni** (c. 1430–1516). The first great master of the Venetian Renaissance, a major painter of Madonnas and large altarpieces that span the period from the Early to the High Renaissance. Among the first to introduce landscape as an important expressive element of his paintings.

**Berruguete, Pedro** (c. 1450–1503/4). Spanish painter who worked for King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella and painted in Toledo and Avila. Worked for Federigo da Montefeltro in Urbino, completing a series of famous men begun by Justus of Ghent.

**Boccaccio, Giovanni** (1313–1375). Humanist, poet, and author of the *Decameron*, a collection of 100 stories whose backdrop was the Black Death. These tales established the vernacular Italian prose style.

**Botticelli, Sandro** (1445–1510). Student of Filippo Lippi who became one of the most original painters of the last quarter of the Quattrocento. A lyrical style joined to innovative religious and allegorical subject matter

resulted in famous works, such as the *Birth of Venus* and *Primavera* (“*Spring*”), both created for the Medici family, who often patronized his art.

**Brunelleschi, Filippo** (1377–1446). Seminal architect and engineer of the Italian Renaissance, he was widely famous for designing the dome of the Duomo in Florence. Usually credited as the inventor of linear perspective, he was also a sculptor.

**Buonarotti, Michelangelo** (1475–1564). One of history’s greatest and most famous artists, he was a sculptor, architect, and painter whose work was so overpowering in its effect that his influence was inescapable during his own lifetime and has never abated. His training was in Florence, and his career was divided between that city and Rome, where his imprint on the architecture and decoration of Saint Peter’s and the Vatican is permanent.

**Carpaccio, Vittore** (c. 1465–c. 1526). Venetian portraitist and painter of narrative cycles decorating the halls of confraternities, he excelled in the depiction of contemporary Venice.

**Castagno, Andrea del** (c. 1419–1457). A specialist in fresco, he concentrated on the illusion of three-dimensionality in the figures in his paintings. He worked primarily in Florence.

**Castiglione, Baldassare** (1478–1529). Author of *The Book of the Courtier* (1528), a vivid description of the manners and ideals of a humanist court (Urbino) and the intellectual and cultural life of the Renaissance aristocracy. Himself an aristocrat, he later served as Mantuan ambassador to Rome and as Papal Nuncio to Spain.

**Correggio (Antonio Allegri)** (1494–1534). Centered in Parma, he took spatial illusionism to a new level of daring in his dome frescoes in the cathedral and the Church of Saint John the Evangelist there. He also had a soft, fluid brushwork in his easel paintings (especially of nudes) that anticipated the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Rococo style.

**da Fabriano, Gentile** (c. 1385–1427). Painter who continued in the International Gothic style through the first quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. He worked in Venice, Florence, Siena, and Rome.

**da Messina, Antonello** (c. 1430–1479). From Messina, studied and worked in Naples before going to Venice for two years, where he produced paintings that greatly affected the direction of Venetian art by their influence on Giovanni Bellini, Giorgione, and Titian. Especially important

was his use of the oil medium, learned from Flemish painters, which then became the favored medium of Venetian painters.

**da Montefeltro, Federigo (or Federico)** (1422–1482). Duke of Urbino and one of the most famous patrons of Renaissance culture. A mercenary soldier (*condottiere*) by profession, he made the small principality of Urbino into a jewel of Quattrocento civilization.

**da Panicale, Masolino** (1383–1440 or 1447). Masolino was the artist who began work in the Brancacci Chapel before being joined by Masaccio. He left that project to work in Hungary for two years, followed by four more years in Rome. His art essentially continues the International Gothic style.

**da Vinci, Leonardo** (1452–1519). The embodiment of the Renaissance man, Leonardo was a universal genius in painting, sculpture, architecture, drawing, and the sciences of his day. He trained in Verrocchio's workshop. In addition to Florence, he later worked for a long period in Milan for the Sforza family, as well as in Rome. He spent his last years in France at the court of Francis I.

**della Francesca, Piero** (c. 1420–1492). Now considered one of the greatest of Renaissance painters, he was primarily associated with smaller urban centers, such as Urbino and Arezzo, where he created the fresco cycle *The Legend of the True Cross*. He was also a theorist and skilled mathematician.

**di Bondone, Giotto** (1266/67–1337). One of the greatest Italian painters of any period, his frescoes in the Scrovegni (Arena) Chapel in Padua became a pilgrimage spot for subsequent artists. He is often described as a proto-Renaissance painter, because his emphasis on substantial figures of solemn and significant bearing and his early use of perspective recession anticipate the Quattrocento by more than a century.

**di Buoninsegna, Duccio** (active c. 1278–1318). Siennese painter, contemporary with Giotto, famous for his extensive altarpiece for the Siena Cathedral, *The Majesty* (*Maestà*).

**di Giorgio Martini, Francesco** (1439–1501/2). A versatile Siennese artist gifted in sculpture, painting, and architecture. He also worked for the duke of Urbino.

**Donatello (Donato di Niccolò Bardi)** (1386–1466). The greatest sculptor of the early Renaissance, he worked in Florence and in Padua. He was equally adept in carving stone and wood and in modeling and casting

bronze figures. He was among the first to introduce linear perspective (in relief sculpture) and the first since antiquity to create a life-size bronze equestrian statue.

**Florentino, Rosso (Giovanni Battista di Jacopo)** (1495–1540). Rosso was a Florentine painter who was deeply affected by the sack of Rome. He developed a personal version of the mannerist style, which he later introduced into France, where he worked for Francis I at Fontainebleau from 1530.

**Ghiberti, Lorenzo** (c. 1381–1455). Celebrated sculptor whose greatest achievements were two sets of bronze doors for the Florentine Baptistery, including the so-called “Gates of Paradise.”

**Ghirlandaio, Domenico** (1449–1494). Florentine fresco specialist who operated one of the most sought-after large workshops of the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. His narrative scenes are packed with details of contemporary life and with portraits of notable Florentines.

**Giorgione (Giorgio da Castelfranco)** (c. 1476/78–1510). Exceptional Venetian artist who studied with Giovanni Bellini and worked with Titian. He is considered one of the central revolutionary painters of the Venetian Renaissance. His extensive inclusion of landscape in his paintings, his masterful use of oil paints, and his characteristic softness of touch, together with his ambiguous subject matter and the rarity of his surviving paintings, have made him one of the most-discussed and admired artists of the Renaissance.

**Goes, Hugo van der** (c. 1440–1482). A Flemish painter from Ghent who was commissioned by Tommaso Portinari, a Medici banking agent in the Netherlands, to paint a huge altarpiece for a family chapel in Florence, where it had a measurable impact on Florentine painters.

**Gozzoli, Benozzo** (1420–1497). A painter who worked in Fra Angelico’s shop in Florence and in the Vatican and with Ghiberti on the second set of doors for the Baptistery. He is best known for his frescoes in the chapel of the Medici Palace.

**Justus of Ghent** (1430–c. 1480). Flemish painter active in Antwerp and Ghent, he went to Rome, then to Urbino by 1472. There, he painted a series of famous men and a notable altarpiece of the *Communion of the Apostles* for the Church of Corpus Domini.

**Laurana, Luciano** (c. 1420/25–1479). Architect from Dalmatia, he worked in Mantua and Pesaro before he was chosen by Federigo da Montefeltro to be the architect of the ducal palace in Urbino (1465–c. 1472). His courtyard there is widely regarded as one of the finest architectural achievements of the Renaissance.

**Lippi, Filippino** (1457/8–1504). Son of Filippo Lippi, he studied with his father and with Botticelli. He completed the fresco cycle in the Brancacci Chapel. He worked in both Rome and Florence.

**Lippi, Fra Filippo** (c. 1406–1469). A Florentine Carmelite monk and painter, he left the monastery, married, and continued to paint religious subjects. His lyrical style was much favored by the Medici family.

**Mantegna, Andrea** (c. 1430/31–1506). Master painter in Padua and Mantua, his art has a sculptural quality, combined with rich color and a spirit of pathos. Deeply influenced by the remains of Roman art that he studied carefully, he was also an innovator in spatial illusionism in painting. He was a major influence on Venetian Renaissance painting through his brother-in-law, Giovanni Bellini.

**Masaccio (Tommaso di ser Giovanni)** (1401–1428). The most important and famous early Renaissance painter in Italy, his fame centers on the Brancacci Chapel in Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence. His frescoes in both the Brancacci Chapel and Santa Maria Novella present a new sense of solidity in his figures and a greater understanding of scale and perspective than that of any of his contemporaries.

**Monaco, Lorenzo** (c. 1370–c. 1425). A Sienese painter of the International Gothic style, he also worked in Florence. For a time he was a Carmelite monk, hence his name.

**Orcagna, Andrea** (c. 1308–1368). Fourteenth-century Florentine painter, sculptor, and architect, whose mature career coincided with the catastrophic plague that ravaged Italy and Europe. His art consequently was regressive and medieval in its severe hieratic style.

**Parmigianino (Francesco Mazzola)** (1503–1540). Born in Parma, where he was influenced by Correggio, he was a fluent draftsman, printmaker, and painter. He was imprisoned during the sack of Rome. His mature style was mannerism, characterized by the stylized elongation of forms.

**Perugino (Pietro Vanucci)** (1446–1523). As his name implies, he was from the central Italian hill town of Perugia. He was the head of a large and influential workshop. An esteemed Quattrocento painter, he worked in the Vatican in 1482 and 1508. Perugino was the teacher of Raphael.

**Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca)** (1304–1374). Petrarch was an extremely important and influential Italian humanist and poet, who along with Dante, wrote in Italian, as well as Latin.

**Pisanello, Antonio** (c. 1395–1455/6). Pisanello was the most important Renaissance sculptor of medals. He was also an important painter in tempera and fresco in the International Gothic style.

**Pollaiuolo, Antonio** (1433–1498). Significant sculptor, painter, and engraver, who (with his younger brother, Piero) headed a large workshop in Florence. Pollaiuolo was also an early innovator in printmaking and exquisite small bronze sculpture.

**Pontormo (Jacopo Carucci)** (1494–1556). A 16<sup>th</sup>-century Florentine painter of frescoes, portraits, and religious subjects on canvas. He worked in a mannerist idiom characterized by ambiguous expressions, illogical space, and strangely weightless forms.

**Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio or Santi)** (1483–1520). The illustrious Renaissance painter born in Urbino who studied first with his father, then with Perugino. He worked in Florence from 1504 to 1508 and later in Rome until his widely mourned premature death. A major portrait artist who also was renowned for his many graceful images of the Madonna, his larger masterpieces were the frescoes decorating the papal apartments in the Vatican that were painted for Popes Julius II and Leo X. His historical importance and fame has continued throughout the subsequent 500 years.

**Robbia, Luca della** (1400–1482). Luca was the most important artist of a large family of sculptors associated with the invention and use of glazed terracotta. He was one of the most important of the first generation of Renaissance artists in Florence, famous for his *Cantoria*, or choir gallery, executed for the Duomo.

**Rossellino, Antonio** (1427–c. 1479). A major Florentine sculptor who was the pupil of his brother, Bernardo. Rossellino created many important portrait busts, as well as his masterpiece, the Tomb of the Cardinal of Portugal in San Miniato al Monte, Florence.

**Sansovino, Jacopo (Jacopo Tatti)** (1486–1570). Florentine architect and sculptor, worked in Rome and Florence. From 1529, he was the official architect of Venice, where he introduced the classical Renaissance style. He designed the state library in Venice that now bears his name.

**Savonarola, Girolamo** (1452–1498). Savonarola was a charismatic Florentine religious reformer and Dominican monk. His popular preaching in Florence against the vanity and materialism of the upper classes and the corruption of the clergy coincided with the expulsion of the Medici. He also urged the invasion of Italy by Charles VIII of France. In 1497, he was excommunicated, and the following May, he was burned at the stake in Florence.

**Signorelli, Luca** (c. 1441–1523). Luca was a painter of powerfully modeled nude figures, especially in the San Brixio Chapel in the Cathedral at Orvieto, that later influenced Michelangelo.

**Tintoretto, Jacopo (Jacopo Robusti)** (1518–1594). The dyer's son was a Venetian painter of religious altarpieces and large decorative cycles, most prominent among them the complete decorations of the two-story Scuola Grande di San Rocco. He was the major Venetian artist to respond to the elements of central Italian mannerist style.

**Titian (Tiziano Vecellio)** (c. 1488/90–1576). The long-lived Titian was the greatest Venetian High Renaissance painter. The unsurpassed richness of his color and his sensuous and monumental figures defined Venetian painting, and his influence has reverberated through the history of art from Rubens to Delacroix to Renoir.

**Uccello, Paolo** (1397–1475). Painter and designer of stained glass. Notable for his emphasis on linear perspective, his paintings often sacrifice everything else to perspective effects.

**Vasari, Giorgio** (1511–1574). Famous biographer of Italian artists, as well as an architect and painter. He was a close friend and disciple of Michelangelo.

**Veneziano, Domenico** (c. 1410–1461). A Venetian artist who moved to Florence, bringing a new style characterized by a delicate, light-filled palette. Probably the teacher of Piero della Francesca.



**Veneziano, Paolo** (active 1333–1358). An important Trecento Venetian artist who painted in the older Byzantine style throughout his life, specializing in ornate altarpieces.

**Veronese, Paolo (Paolo Cagliari)** (c. 1528–1588). In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Veronese worked in Venice as the greatest decorator of palaces, mainland villas, and monastery refectories. He was famous for his depiction of richly colored, sumptuous costumes and his immense, illusionistic settings. He worked extensively in the ducal palace in Venice, as well as on numerous other wall and ceiling frescoes. He was also an important painter of altarpieces.

**Verrocchio, Andrea del** (c. 1435–1488). Florentine sculptor, goldsmith, painter. Although Verrocchio was active mainly in Florence, he was famous throughout Italy. Versatile and gifted, he designed the *Colleoni* statue in Venice, the second great bronze equestrian statue of the Renaissance, after Donatello's *Gattamelata*. He was also the teacher of Leonardo.

**Vivarini, Antonio** (c. 1418–c. 1476/84). One of the last major Italian painters in the Gothic style, he often worked with his little-known brother-in-law, Giovanni d'Alemagna. He and his brother, Bartolomeo, ran a large workshop in Venice.

## Bibliography

**Note:** An asterisk before an entry in this bibliography indicates that the book is out of print.

### Essential Reading:

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